No. 999
Friday
7 April 2000
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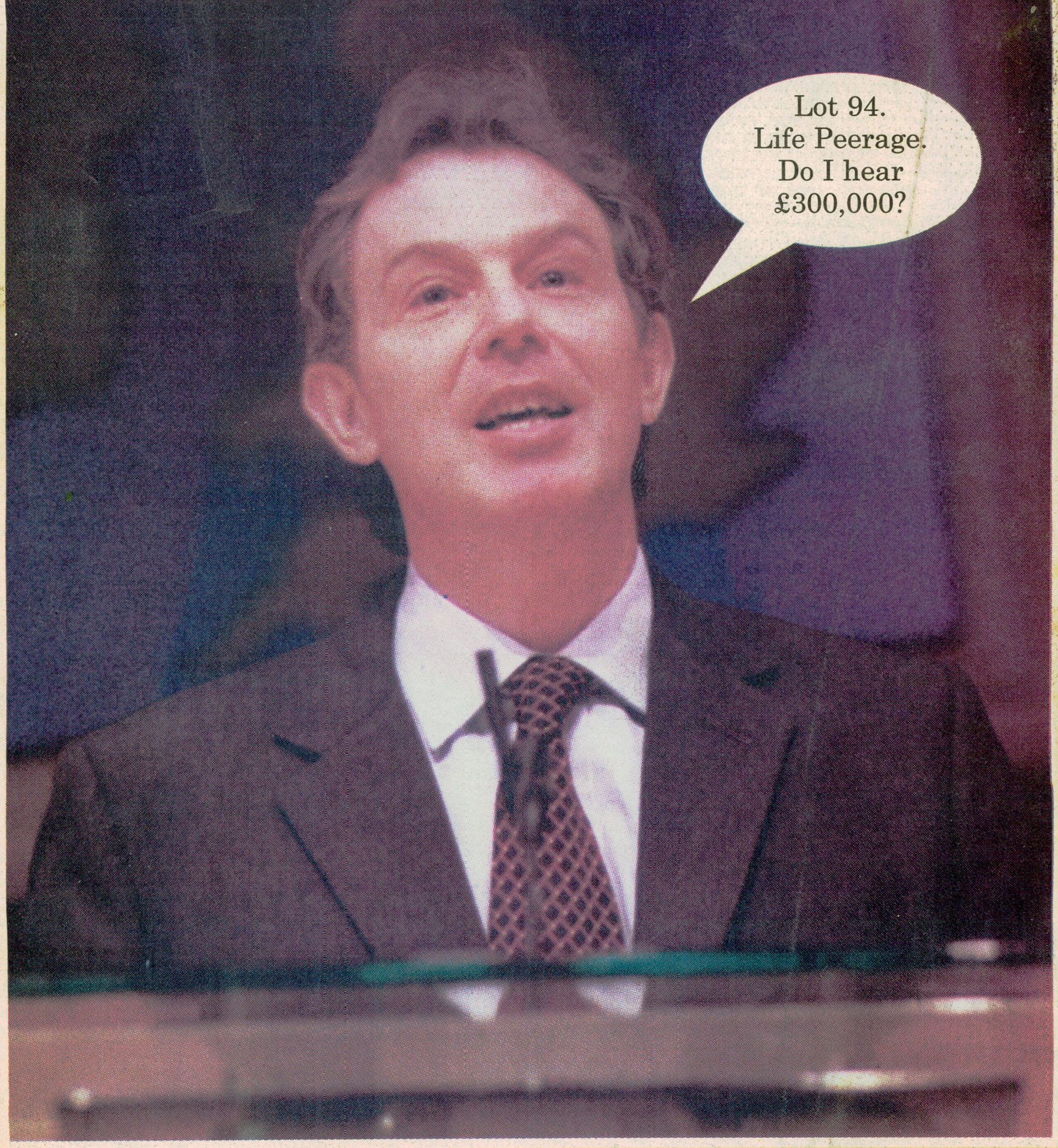
PRIVATE EYE

LORDS NEW SHOCK



GOVERNMENT AUCTION NEWS

The **monthly journal** for the most comprehensive nationwide coverage of:

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Dumped here as a schoolboy, this man is now a success in the City... yet still we want to deport him

Why the case of Ben James shames Britain

The Express December 14, 1998

The Express June 10, 1999

Readers back Ben's fight to stay

The Express June 14, 1999

STRAW TOLD: THINK AGAIN

Judge praises our campaign for Ben

The Express September 9, 1999

HOME SWEET HOME

Victory for Express campaign to let Ben James stay in Britain

The Express March 30, 2000

THE VOICE THAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

THE EXPRESS

Surprised? You shouldn't be.

*Survey undertaken by NOP Market Research among 1,000 randomly selected bank customers. Interviews were conducted by telephone between 18 Nov 1999 and 10 Dec 1999. For written details write to First Direct, Freepost, Leeds LS98 2RF. We reserve the right to decline to open an account for you. To maintain a quality service, calls may be monitored and/or recorded. Applicants must be 18 or over. Credit facilities are subject to status. **LLOYDS TSB.** The costs comprise fees of £5 per month. **BARCLAYS.** The costs comprise fees of £5 per month. **NATWEST.** The costs comprise fees of £5 per month. **First Direct** variable interest rate for overdrafts of £250 is **12.6% EAR**. All information based on authorised overdrafts of £250 for 6 days or more per month. The rate and fees correct as at 1 March 2000 but may vary in the future. All UK customer calls charged at local rate. First Direct is a division of HSBC Bank plc.

stop talking at the back

How many times have you just slipped into the red - especially at the end of the month - and been rapped on the knuckles with interest charges and fees? Why do most banks insist on treating their customers like naughty schoolchildren?

	annual fee for £250 overdraft
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Barclays Bank Account	£60
NatWest Current	£60
First Direct Cheque Account	**nil**

At First Direct we believe in treating our customers as grown ups. (Despite the fact that we reward them with the sticky toffee apple of free banking!)

what do we want? free banking

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join us and tell your friends

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escape

into the fleecy pyjamas of free banking

TM

Gnome

ONCE again the media has taken an innocent remark and misquoted it. Reports in the newspapers claiming that I said: "I want to be called Lord Gnome of Belize" have been used against me to embarrass the Conservative leadership of William Hague.

This is sadly typical of today's journalists, who have conducted a malicious campaign of mis-information about my business affairs and international dealings.

In this case, what was clearly nothing more than an amusing April Fool's Day joke has been deliberately and wilfully misinterpreted. What I actually said was that I wanted to be called "Baron Gnome of Sleaze" – an altogether different and much more innocent request.

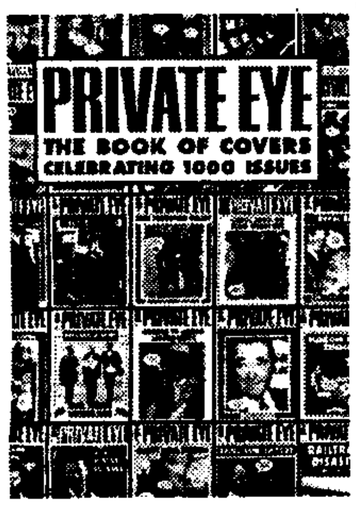
E. Strobes
pp. Lord Gnome of
Don'tBelizeYou
The House of Frauds
South America.

The next issue of **Private Eye** is the 1000th edition. This will have a 'special' glossy cover and will be on sale from Wednesday 19th April — don't miss it!

And, to celebrate 1000 issues, Private Eye is publishing a new book of classic Eye covers

The Private Eye team will be signing copies at Books etc, 421 Oxford Street (opp. Selfridges), W1 on Tuesday 18 April 12noon – 2pm.

To reserve signed copies contact Books etc on 020 7495 5850



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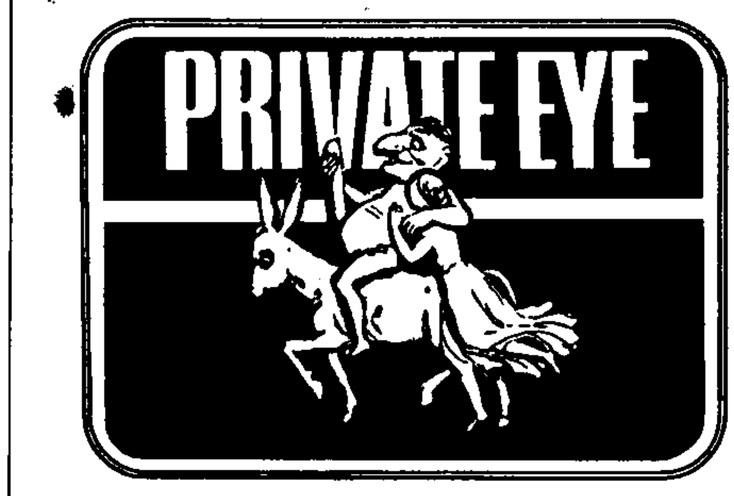
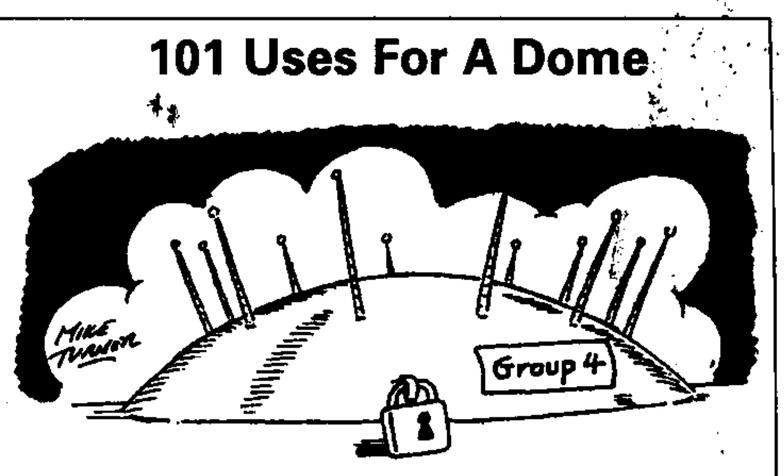


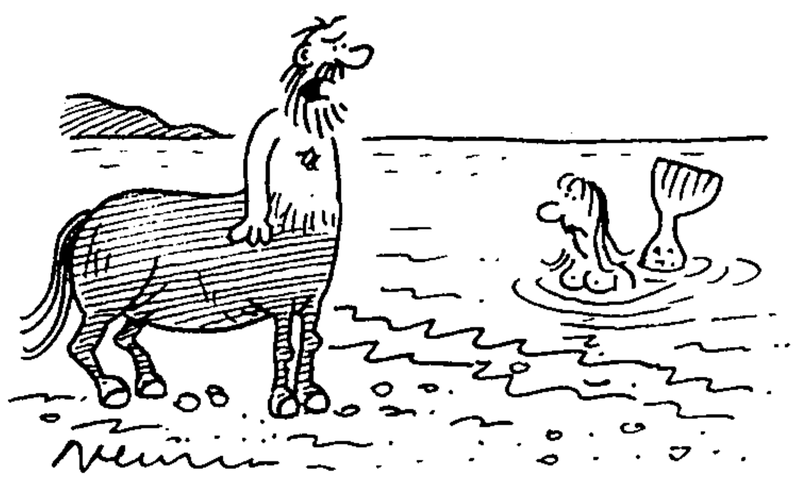


THE consortium of three firms carefully selected by the government to take over the highly sensitive atomic weapons establishment at Aldermaston includes British Nuclear Fuels (BNFL) – recently disgraced over the deliberate falsification of radiation data, which lost it business in Japan; and Lockheed Martin, a firm with a similarly controversial record (see *Eyes* 972 and 974).

On 26 March BBC's *Panorama* revealed terrifying reports of lax safety controls at nuclear sites managed by Lockheed in the US. When these reports were put to the minister who chose Lockheed for Aldermaston, Baroness Simons, she replied blandly that she had not seen them and probably would not have understood them if she had.

Other *Eye* figures feature in this saga too. On the day the prime minister announced that BNFL was too incompetent and untrustworthy even to be privatised, the Atomic Energy Authority (AEA) was fined £101,000 for irradiating three workers at its Dounreay plant. In charge of the AEA at the time of the irradiation was Sir Anthony Cleaver.

When US-owned Lockheed started bidding for the Aldermaston job, it decided to give its board a more English flavour. From a long line of knighted British industrialists it chose, er, Sir Anthony Cleaver...



"If you ask me, it's high time they closed Sellafield"

"SCALPING" is a new form of stealing – taking advertised jobs off other people's websites and copying them on to your own.

The department of trade and industry takes a dim view of this and proposes a new law to make it a crime with a fine of £5,000 for every advert stolen. But who is the main offender? Step forward Reed Online, whose executives cheerfully confirm that they steal job adverts from other websites all the time without advertisers' permission.

A Reed spokeswoman told the *Eye* the company would stop the stealing if the other advertisers "made a lot of fuss"; but since other agencies don't get any notice that their stuff is being stolen, they don't have much of a chance to complain.

Asked about the proposed changes in the law, the Reed spokeswoman said they would think about any new regulations but for now would continue to steal stuff from other websites "because that is the way we see the web developing". Will any action be taken against these new cyberspace thieves? Before you answer, remember the following facts:

Reed's chairman Alex Reed is a prominent Blairite and "new" Labour supporter.

Reed has "special responsibility for the unemployed" in Doncaster and London boroughs Hackney and Haringey under the government's employment zone and new deal schemes.

Former Labour party general secretary Tom Sawyer sits on the Reed board.

YORKSHIRE's gain is to be the Midlands' loss. No sooner had Brandon Gough signed-off as chairman of Kelda (aka Yorkshire Water) with 500 sackings and a £1,200 bash for his pals at the Ritz (*Eye* 997), than he picked up another lucrative post.

Gough has been made chairman of the MG Car Company, the management team established by Alchemy to run the ailing Rover group.

Despite the switch from water to cars, Gough will be making full use of all his transferable skills. His first job will be to sack thousands of workers at Longbridge and elsewhere.

HOME secretary Jack Straw's ban on the right to trial by jury has even alarmed the former Tory prime minister John Major. He recently asked Labour backbencher Paul Flynn if he was "going to vote for that right-wing rubbish".

But try asking off-message Labour backbenchers how Straw's new legislation might have affected the young Peter Hain, now a foreign office minister, who was arrested on trumped up charges of attempting to rob a bank in Putney in the 1970s.

The framing of Hain was widely attributed to the activities of Boss, the South African secret service, who took a dim view of the young South African's anti-apartheid activities. But if Hain had been arrested today, note the Commons wags, he probably wouldn't have had a trial by jury and might even now be contemplating a 14-year stretch at Her Majesty's pleasure.

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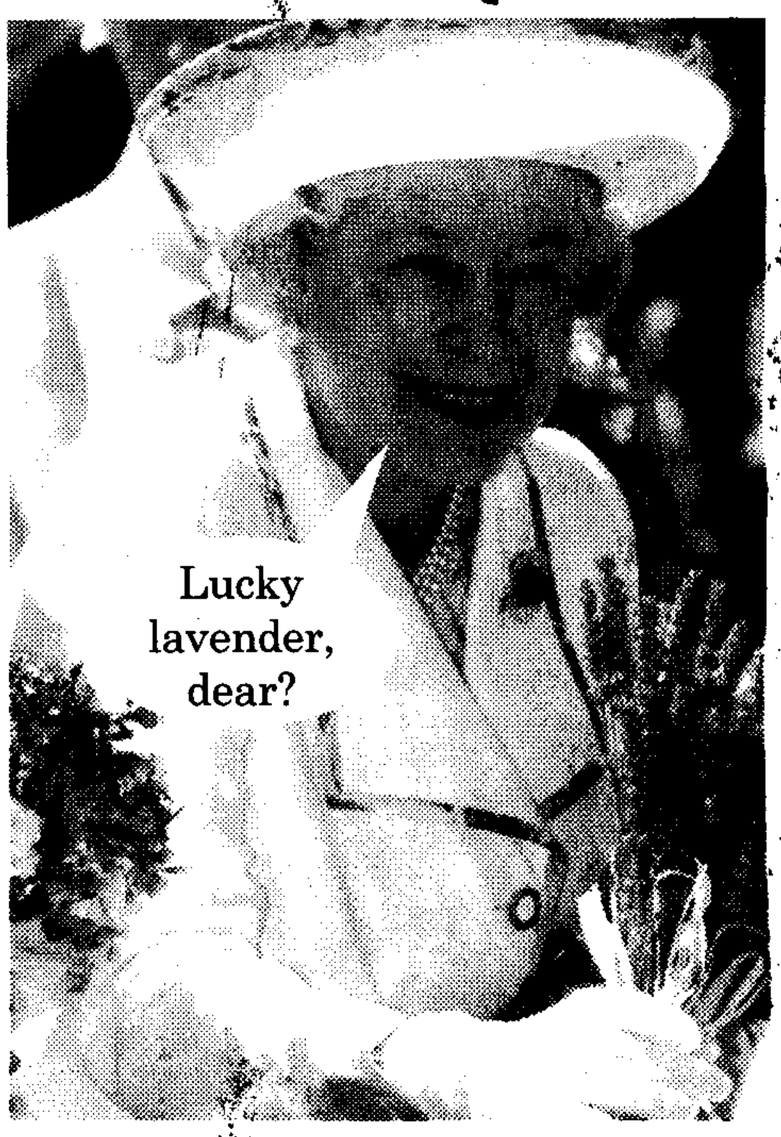
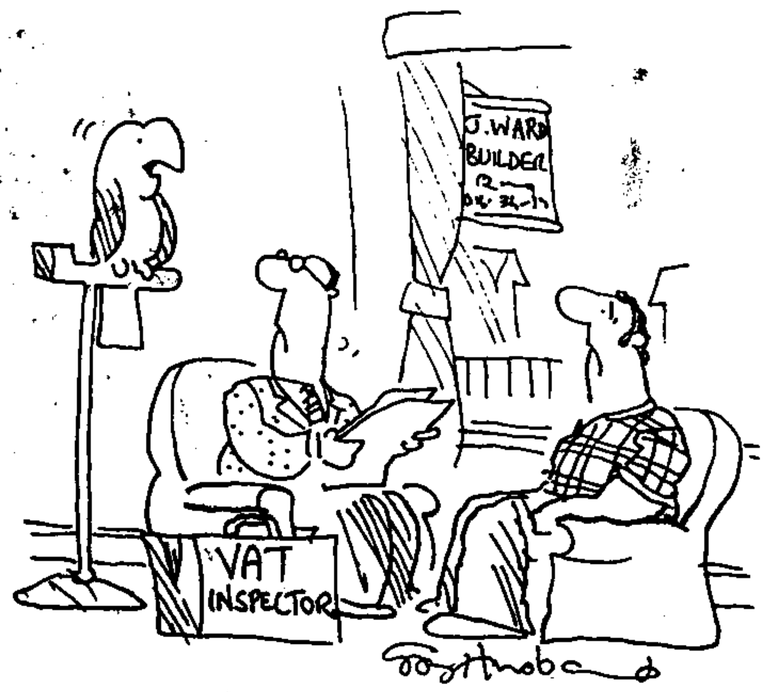
NEW LOOK QUEEN



Lucky lavender, dear?



"Yeah... cash will do nicely, mate!"

ENERGY UPDATE

AT LEAST BNFL's lost business has left it free to divert British taxpayers' money to other worthy causes – such as its continuing bid to build a nuclear power station 13 miles from an active earthquake fault line in the Akkuyu region of Turkey (see *Eye* 984).

For the sixth time since the bid was opened in 1997, the Turkish government recently delayed deciding which of three international consortia will build the reactor. The contenders include US firm Westinghouse, acquired last year by BNFL in conjunction with another US company Morris Knudsen (see *Eye* 983); AECL of Canada; and Franco-German Nuclear Power International (NPI). The winner was due to be announced on 7 April, although no one was holding their breath.

Meanwhile the Turkish government is studying a report from the head of its national energy committee and NATO director, Professor Ibrahim Kavrakoglu, who says: "Not only would a nuclear power station be incompatible with the interests of this country, but it would present many new risks. I urge you to rethink such an investment that would endanger future generations."

"The problem of nuclear wastes hasn't been solved. The transportation and storage of nuclear wastes and the 'decommissioning' of nuclear stations who [sic] are no longer useful are serious and expensive issues. Accidents occur even in the most experienced and technologically advanced countries."

Surely when he wrote these words Prof Kavrakoglu did not have in mind the recent problems experienced by BNFL?

FOLLOWING in the footsteps of Enron, the US utilities giant responsible for hogging railway freight wagons desperately needed by Scottish Coal (see *Eye* 990), the future of British coal once again rests in the hands of a US multinational.

AES, which took over the Drax power station in North Yorkshire from National Power last December, has to decide whether to continue using British coal or to switch to cheaper imports when its contracts are renewed in September 2001.

At the moment all Drax coal is supplied by the British company RJB Mining whose prices are about 15 percent higher than the world average. RJB, which owns 13 pits, has asked the government to provide £73m in subsidies over the next three years to help it fight off competition from cheaper coal suppliers in Germany, Spain and Poland.

An AES spokesman admitted that if the government, which is due to make an announcement any day, fails to come up with the goods, it could force them to change to a foreign supplier.

This is not the first time AES has tried to engineer a public cash windfall. Last September the power company became the main supplier of electricity in the Indian province of Orissa. Following the devastating cyclone there at the end of October, which killed thousands, AES demanded that the Indian government bear the entire loss of US$60m because the company did not have insurance cover.

The hugely profitable US firm, which looks set to profit from a subsidy paid by UK taxpayers, is holding the Indian government to ransom threatening to charge Orissa's disaster-stricken population of ten million three times as much for their electricity if the government does not pay up.

Street Of Shame

JAMES HIPWELL and Anil Bhoyrul, the disgraced City Slickers, are still trying to corral other hacks into their sin-bin. For the past three editions the dismal duo have used their column in *Punch* (owned by that beacon of integrity Mohamed "Fugger" Fayed) to threaten a "senior executive" at Jeff Randall's *Sunday Business* with exposure.

"We've been delving deep into the private lives of one of Jeff's executives," they write. "To be Frank, what we've found is so shocking, so despicable, so cruel, that we can't bring ourselves to say it. Yet.

"The guy in question may want to do the decent thing and resign before our revelations. So here's your chance, pal. The gun is loaded, and the finger is getting twitchy on the trigger."

What has prompted this high moral tone from the Slickers? Not, surely, the fact that they worked for the original *Sunday Business* under Tom Rubython before it collapsed, or that Anal Boil was turned down for a job on the relaunched newspaper, or that *Sunday Business* has led the pack in investigating the *Mirror* share-tipping affair?

And the amazing scoop they have on a "senior executive" appears to be that, er, his marriage has broken down.

PS: On 26 March, for the first time in many weeks, there were no further revelations about the *Mirror* scandal in *Sunday Business*. This is of course entirely unrelated to the fact that Jeff Randall was seen enjoying a convivial lunch with Mirror Group boss Sir Victor Blank just two days earlier.

MUCH unkind chortling at the *Grauniad*, where deputy literary editor Giles Foden has been careless enough to leave an excruciatingly toadying letter to the poet laureate Andrew Motion in a computer folder open to all.

"Dear Andrew," writes Foden, "I hope you are well. I am writing in the first instance, and in what curiously seems to demand a certain formality of tone, to distance myself from the negative comment about your new role that has run in the *Guardian* over the past year. Some misguided and ill-read individuals on the news and arts desks clearly had it in for you, and I am sorry about that, but was pretty powerless to do much about it... what a nasty business newspapers can sometimes be."

"FOR all the horror, at least cults display passion," wrote Janet Street Piss-Porter in her picture byline editorial in the *Independent on Sunday* on 26 March, talking about the 1,000 violent deaths of the followers of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God in Kanungu, Uganda.

Never able to resist a reference to herself, Piss-Porter argues: "It is too simple to condemn these cults as dangerous sects led by power-crazed prophets. I once made a series of documentaries about cults which attracted young people from the Children of God to the Moonies to transcendental meditation.

"The deaths in Uganda bring home the reality that most people expect more from Christianity than a lot of its leaders know how to give; people will look elsewhere for spiritual nourishment. There is never any point in trying to ban cults: they provide a useful home for a certain kind of needy person."

And what's this in the *Sindy* on 2 April? "The Full Moonie", a glossily illustrated guides to the Brazilian kingdom of New Hope, "the most audacious creation to date of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon".

OH, YEAH?

Yet the producers claim that it is the quality of her performance, rather than the striptease, that is selling tickets. The actress takes the role of Mrs Robinson – made famous by Anne Bancroft in the 1967 film – who embarks on an affair with the son of family friends who is half her age.

– *The Times*, 31 March

THE *Mail on Sunday*'s Save Our Banks campaign reached its peak on 2 April in the run up to the closure of 172 branches of Barclays on 7 April.

Five full pages of the *Financial MoS* were devoted to the campaign, while personal finance editor Jeff Prestridge fulminated against the heartless bank in his column: "How contemptible. How utterly contemptible."

Lest anyone accuse the *MoS* of placing principle before profit, however, on pages 16 and 17 of the main section was a double page ad for... Barclays, part of its "A big world needs a big bank" campaign.

WHEN British Airways and the *Daily Mail* offered a half price flights deal, readers were complaining to the Advertising Standards Agency (ASA) faster than you can say "Bob Ayling".

Some couldn't book the flights they wanted and others thought it unfair that BA turned them down on a "subject to availability" proviso. The ASA upheld two complaints, ruling that it was misleading not to make it clear that flights to Australia and Singapore had to be made before 9 December. And it wasn't really fair to include a photo of the Grand Palace in Bangkok and the come-on "Explore exotic Bangkok" when Bangkok was not one of the destinations on offer.

HOW JOURNALISM WORKS

THE *Express* got rather carried away with a story about how Richmond upon Thames council had supposedly turned down a plan for a mobile phone mast near a school because supermodel Jerry Hall had objected to it.

"Jerry gives Orange the pip" was the headline over Dennis Rice and James O'Brien's tale about how the council was "licking its wounds after making the mistake of attempting to get the better of supermodel Jerry".

This was news to Richmond council, whose development control sub-committee had turned down Orange's application on planning, rather than celebrity, grounds. As a spokeswoman tells the *Eye*: "An *Express* reporter asked me 'Did Jerry Hall's objection have a bearing on the decision?' I replied: 'Absolutely not'."

Meanwhile committee chairman, Cllr Laurence Mann, tells the *Eye*: "I told the reporter I had no idea who Jerry Hall was, although I have since been advised that she was connected with the popular entertainer Mr Jagger."

100 Years Ago

NEW light is shed on the celebrated smear of former army intelligence officer Colin Wallace by David McKittrick, the *Independent*'s award-winning Ireland correspondent.

In September 1987, a few months after Wallace was released from prison after serving six years for the manslaughter of Jonathan Lewis, and just as his protestations of innocence were gaining credibility, McKittrick published a whole page in the *Independent* which borrowed heavily from material available to the authorities to expose Wallace as a fantasist. "Some of Mr Wallace's statements are clearly untrue," wrote McKittrick. "He once claimed to have been a member of the Widgery Tribunal which reported on the Bloody Sunday killings in 1972, but he demonstrably was not."

Among the confidential documents released by the army for the Bloody Sunday inquiry under Lord Justice Saville which has just opened in Derry was one headed *The Tribunal*. Under a sub-head The Tribunal Team, there is a list of names with various responsibilities in the tribunal hearings. The fourth name is "Mr Wallace" who is named as assistant to "the opposition case". This was Colin Wallace, who attended all the tribunal hearings on behalf of the army, and was plainly, as far as the army was concerned, a member of the tribunal team. This is probably why lawyers from Eversheds, who have been investigating Bloody Sunday on behalf of the Saville inquiry, have spent so much time closeted with Colin Wallace, seeking information from him.

Wallace's manslaughter conviction was quashed by the court of appeal in 1996.

Dr Alex Comfort, author of *The Joy of Sex*, has also died, after a series of strokes...**11, 25**

The Times

LIBEL NEWS

TV producer Sean McPhilemy was jubilant last week after winning £145,000 in libel damages from the *Sunday Times*, which had claimed that his notorious Channel 4 documentary on *The Committee* – a secret society of Ulster loyalist bigwigs ordering assassinations – was a hoax.

But he'd be unwise to spend his windfall just yet. Not only is the *Sunday Times* appealing against the verdict, but there are also several pending libel actions arising from McPhilemy's book on the subject – most notably one brought by David Trimble against Amazon.co.uk.

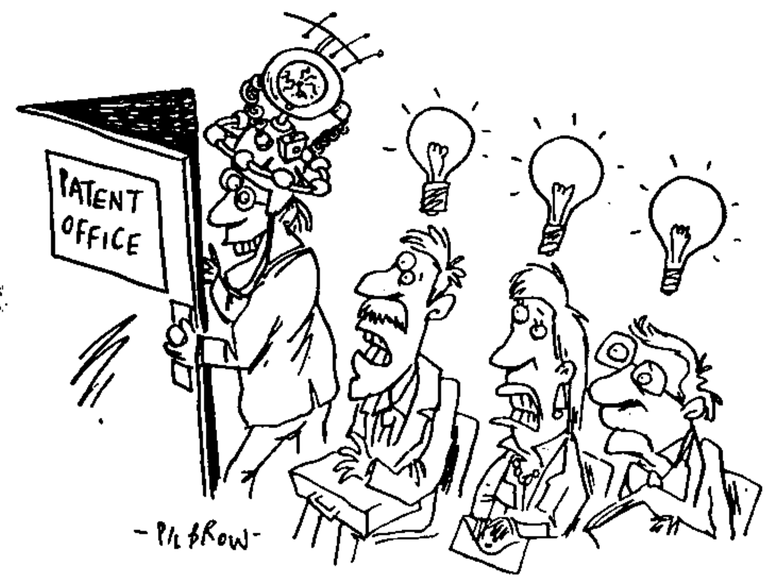
In last week's case no fewer than 19 of 21 alleged members of the committee (including Trimble) testified to their innocence, and none of their evidence was challenged by McPhilemy. But because the burden of proof in libel actions falls on the defendant, the *Sunday Times* had the all but impossible task of proving a negative, ie showing that the Committee didn't exist. In the Trimble case, however, the roles will be reversed, as McPhilemy and his colleagues have to prove to a jury's satisfaction that the Ulster Unionist leader was indeed a member of the Committee.

One of the more curious moments in the *Sunday Times* case occurred when Trimble, under cross-examination, cited Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness as character witnesses. "At no point have either of those gentlemen ever made any reference to this book or the allegations contained within it. If they believed them, I'd have thought they might very well have put them to me, because during the course of those negotiations and discussions I have on a number of occasions referred to the paramilitary organisations which they are associated with and the things that they have done. They have never turned round to say, 'Well, you're just as bad. Look at this book'."

Sure enough, neither Adams nor McGuinness rushed to congratulate McPhilemy on his victory last Thursday. When the original programme was broadcast in 1991, the *Eye* pointed out that its allegations were contradicted by evidence in the public domain. Although those described as victims of the Committee were indeed murdered, in almost all cases there was forensic evidence to show that the perpetrators were members of the UDA or UVF loyalist terror gangs.

During the eight-week libel trial McPhilemy had ample opportunity to "prove" his claims, not least by calling his principal source Jim Sands as a witness. He did not consider it necessary to do so, a fact mentioned by the trial judge during a notably fair summing up.

Meanwhile, back in the real world, the inquiry led by Met commissioner John Stevens continues to try to find out what the army, MI5 and the RUC were up to in the 1980s and early 1990s. The Committee saga may be a goldmine for the legal profession, but it doesn't alter that fact in any way at all.



"I'm patenting my mind-reading device, and all your ideas too"

JONATHAN AITKEN TALL STORIES

"AND ye shall know the truth," Jesus said, "and the truth shall make you free." Jonathan Aitken, born-again Christian, is free at last (apart from that discreet little electronic tag round his ankle) but still hasn't quite mastered the art of truthfulness. One trusts that booksellers will place *Pride and Perjury*, his shamelessly unrepentant memoir, where it belongs: in the fiction section.

If Aitken is to be believed (one of the biggest "ifs" imaginable) he has only ever told one little lie – that foolish fib about who paid his Ritz hotel bill, which he then got his teenage daughter to corroborate.

In February 1994, when cabinet secretary Sir Robin Butler was investigating the Ritz affair, Aitken obtained a letter from the hotel's manager, Frank Klein, recalling that "a brunette lady of European aspect paid the cash sum of Ff4257 in favour of the account of Mr Ayas". Even though Lolicia Aitken was not a brunette, Aitken sent a copy of the letter to Butler as proof that his wife had settled the bill – but omitted the words "in favour of the account of Mr Ayas", thus altering its meaning entirely.

You may search the 369 pages of *Pride and Perjury* for any mention of this sleight-of-hand; but you will search in vain. Even now, it seems, Aitken is still striving to conceal the full extent of his mendacity. On page 85 he has the nerve to attack the *Grauniad* for "selectively editing a letter I had written to Gerald James [chairman of the defence company Astra] in 1985 to make it look as though my offer to introduce the company to a couple of Middle East export contacts had been a business partnership arrangement rather than an act of helpfulness by an MP to a company in his constituency".

But Aitken himself then edits the same letter even more selectively by leaving out this crucial paragraph: "In the course of my last visit to Saudi Arabia, I did discuss Astra with one or two Saudi businessmen who I thought might be effective within the defence field. To date, however, I have not clearly identified an agent who would be likely to deliver an order for military pyrotechnics. However, I do have a good and trusted contact who seems able to produce excellent results in both Iraq and Saudi Arabia. His name is Fouad Makhzoumi." A most generous "act of helpfulness" by the public-spirited MP – even if, as he neglected to tell either Gerald James or the register of members' interests, Aitken was himself a director of Makhzoumi's company at the time.

The most eye-popping example of Aitken's fictional skills concerns his famous "MI6 excuse". In October 1997 Matthew Parris charitably floated the idea that Aitken had to lie about the Ritz weekend because he was engaged in hush-hush work of national importance for the prime minister, who used him as a "back channel" to pass on intelligence from MI6 to the Saudis. Aitken told Parris that it was a "dotty suggestion". But on 21 May 1998 the eve of his indictment, the *Daily Telegraph* ran a front-page splash repeating the dotty suggestion: "I LIED FOR MY COUNTRY, SAYS AITKEN."

Aitken now says that "my morale fell to a new low as I read and re-read both the headline and the formidable details of the *Telegraph*'s story, which was based on an unauthorised leak of Said Ayas's draft witness statement". How odd, then, that the text of the story in the *Torygraph*'s computer had a note added for the benefit of sub-editors, revealing that "this comes directly from Aitken but cannot be directly sourced to him". In other words, the unauthorised leaker was none other than Jonathan of Arabia himself.

Said Ayas was furious, and so Aitken had to issue a hasty repudiation of the MI6 excuse. But in *Pride and Perjury* he revives it once again, claiming that the purpose of his Ritz visit was to set up a "channel of communication" between Britain and Saudi Arabia via Ayas and Prince Mohammed. "It suited both governments to conduct certain sensitive communications through the Prince Mohammed-Ayas-Aitken channel."

There's one rather obvious hole in this ingenious story. If Aitken's trip to Paris was a secret mission on behalf of the government, he might well have felt obliged to deceive the newspapers. But why did he also lie to John Major and Sir Robin Butler, assuring them that his weekend at the Ritz had been a "private" jaunt with his family? As prime minister and cabinet secretary, they could surely have been trusted with the patriotic truth – especially since he was supposedly acting as Major's emissary. Perhaps Aitken will come up with an explanation in time for the paperback edition.

On page 161, Aitken finally confronts the all-important question: why did he lie about the Ritz bill? "The answer to that is two words: fear and arrogance." Three other words might usefully be added: force of habit. And, as his self-pitying and mendacious book proves, he still can't kick the habit.

"Leo, you're taking yourself too bloody seriously!"

JEFFREY ARCHER SHORT STORIES

JEFFREY ARCHER's latest book *To Cut A Long Story Short* – or the London Underground poster that advertises it, anyway – is proving popular with graffiti artists.

Above a photograph of the book itself runs the eye-catching copy: "The secret of great story-telling is never to give away the...", at which point the text runs off the edge of the poster.

No doubt the missing word is supposed to be "ending", but at Bromley-by-Bow station some scamp, mindful of Lord Archer's towering reputation perhaps, has added the word "truth".

IN THE unlikely event that Lord Archersick-ofhim's *Spectacularlyboring* Diary contribution of 11 March is to be believed, the seaside peer's new book *To Cut A Long Story Short* has been a great success.

"Adrian Bourne of HarperCollins calls to tell me that they have sold into the shops 132,000 hardback copies – the largest I've ever managed for a set of short stories," Archer notes.

If this is not another textbook case of Archolian embroidery, one can't help but think that Harpic and the bookshop buyers have been rather too optimistic. In its second week of publication the book shifted just 1,140 copies nationwide. That means just 116 weeks to get rid of the stock....

WHEN the seaside peer goes on later to discuss the signing of a new book deal we're on safer ground: he's definitely not telling the truth.

"Thursday, 9 March – my contract with HarperCollins comes to an end at midnight," he reports in his typical breathless, hackneyed thriller style. "I will now have to decide – following the departure of Eddie Bell as chairman of the company – whether I sign another three-book contract with Harpers or begin to look for another publisher. But that's a decision I don't have to make this week."

In fact, by the time he penned the column, he had more than begun to shop around, having already summoned several publishers to a beauty contest at his riverside penthouse flat and whittled them down to two – Harpic and Macmillan, his existing publisher being pronounced the $17m victor last week.

"It's the best place to put it"

SAY what you like about Alan Milburn (so long as he doesn't hear you) but he's certainly not afraid of a fight – especially when the odds are in his favour.

While Tony Blair preferred to address the latest Conference of General Practitioners via video link – all the better to control outbursts from outraged medics – Big Al at least had the courage to wrap tape around his knuckles and attend in person.

First he cornered BBC health correspondent Richard Hannaford and subjected him to a volley of blows about the Beeb's "fucking disgraceful" coverage of his crap NHS. When Hannaford put up a stout defence of his craft, Milburn turned instead on Sharon Alcock, a hapless junior BBC reporter who is seven months pregnant but who nevertheless had to endure a similar tirade about "fucking unfair coverage" complete with jabbing fingers and a menacing scowl.

Shocked onlookers were left wondering whether Milburn was tired and emotional, just doing Millbank's bidding – or whether he had a serious problem with his temper.

MOUNTAINS of space have been devoted to the wonderful things Gordon Brown's budget has done for the poor and the National Health Service. But not enough credit has been given for all the wonderful things the budget does for the rich.

Chief among these is the relaxation of capital gains tax on shares. This measure makes no distinction between rich and poor shareholders. The main beneficiaries by far will be the super-rich who own vast chunks of shares, capital gains on which will after 2003 be taxed at 10 percent instead of 40 per cent.

Here are some examples of the results of this largesse. Under a generous share option scheme, Martin Sorrell, chairman of advertising agency WPP, stands to make £30m clear profit in five years' time. Mr Brown's budget means he will pay only about £3m tax on that profit, not about £12m as in the dark days of the rich-penalising Tories.

Tim Jackson, founder of internet auctioneer QXL.com, has shares now worth £270m. If things stay about the same, and he sells these by 2003, he will pay £27m tax instead of £108m under the strict old Tory rules. The shares Martha Lane Fox and Brent Hoberman hold in their travel agency lastminute.com have an estimated value of £80m (though the company doesn't yet make a profit). If the company maintains its momentum, and the two sell their shares after 2003, they will pay £8m tax not £32m.

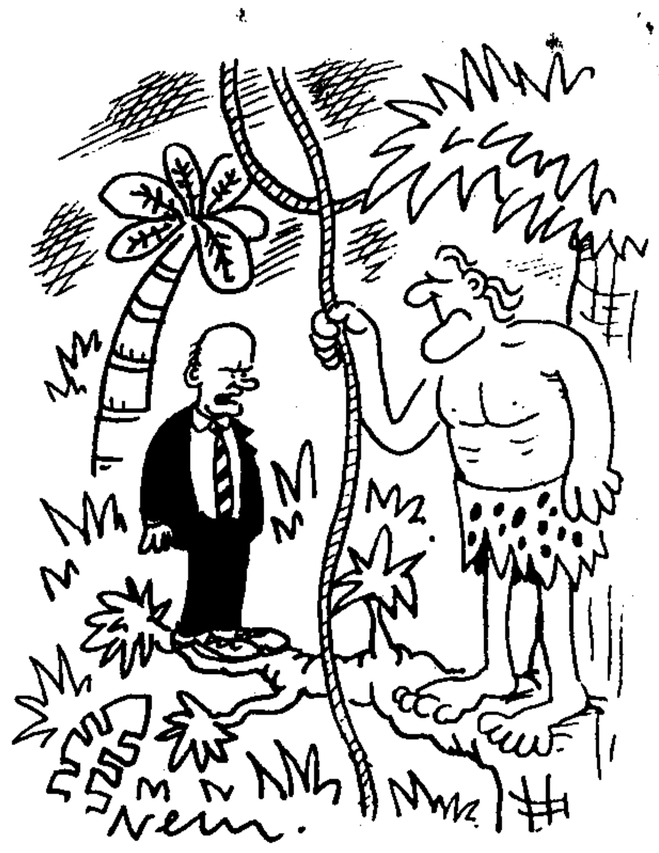
The chancellor always presses his case by stressing how even-handed he is. Little shareholders, he insists, will benefit from his reforms as much as big shareholders. Not quite true, though. Anyone making £7,000 or less profit on selling shares doesn't have to pay a penny tax anyway.

THE appointment of Sodexho to run the voucher system for asylum seekers is proof that home secretary Jack Straw is not against giving money to foreigners – so long as they are big French multinationals. But can asylum seekers expect decent treatment from Sodexho?

One bad omen is that the company has 20 percent of the Correctional Corporation of America, and 20 percent of its British subsidiary, UK Detention Services, which owns and runs Blakenhurst and Forest Bank prisons (regarding the killing of black prisoner Alton Manning at Blakenhurst, see *Eye* 891).

CCA in the US has been plagued by a series of high profile escapes, riots and killings of guards and inmates. Four years ago there was a nasty row when 200 sex offenders were shipped off to a detention centre intended for illegal immigrants, and two of the newcomers escaped.

Another bad day for CCA was the recent decision of South Carolina not to renew a contract with CCA for a juvenile detention centre. The decision was taken after revelations that 18 of the young men were held in a single cell with only paper cups for toilets.



"If you want to be Lord Greystoke, you'll have to leave the jungle"

FOLLOWING news that Labour's Greater London authority (GLA) candidates are urgently seeking to put "pink water" between themselves and doomed mayoral hopeful Frank Dobson, equally depressing reports arrive of public disquiet at Labour's campaign literature which carry pictures of the beaming Buster Merrifield lookalike.

Last week Labour party canvassers handing out the said leaflets at a station in east London were perturbed to find members of the public screwing the material into little balls and throwing them on the ground. As news of the anti-Dobbo revolt spread, other local Labour branches decided only to distribute material for the assembly candidates, leaving Dobbo leaflets to gather dust.

WHAT is the Green Alliance, apart from being the government's favourite "eco" group, and how can one join it?

The answer is that it is not very green and not much of an alliance – oh, and you can't easily join it unless you are a corporation and have £2,500 a year plus VAT to spare.

For this sum the Green Alliance offers firms "invitations to two exclusive dinners a year, featuring discussions with cabinet ministers, high level civil servants and senior environmentalists", a parliamentary newsletter and a journal called, appropriately, *Inside Track*. So far, so much like the usual mix of expensive food and access to top people you get from any eager lobby firm.

The founder member and current treasurer of the alliance is none other than Andrew Gifford of lobbyists GJW. Another founder member is, like Gifford, another ex-member of another slightly tarnished Alliance – that between the late Liberal Party and the less late Social Democratic Party.

Precisely which ministers are on offer to corporate subscribers? Well, the environment minister Michael Meacher spoke to the alliance's annual meeting and addressed an "invitation only" seminar on EU environmental regulation. An even more senior minister, deputy prime minister John Prescott, also spoke at the annual meeting. Stephen Timms, yet another minister, spoke at the Green Alliance's recent "third way" seminar, sponsored by Thames Water.

The alliance can even claim links with Robin Cook, foreign secretary, through another of its organisations, the Green Globe Task Force. In short the alliance offers firms a route to those awkward leftish bits of the cabinet other lobbyists can't reach.

ONE of the brains behind *Conservative Heartland*, the new quarterly magazine for members of the Tory party produced by start-up publishing company Wrap Communications, is Andy Medlock.

Could this be the same A. Medlock who is listed as art editor in the autumn edition of the quarterly magazine for members of the Labour party, *Inside Labour*?

Who says there is no difference between Labour and the Tories?

SO. Farewell then David Simons. The sad departure of the head of supermarket chain Somerfield is not, as some newspapers may have been led to believe, the result of the disastrous merger with Kwik Save in 1998 but a clear case of the curse of Blair (see *Eye* 998).

In 1998 Somerfield splashed out £20,000 to have its logo printed all over Labour party conference passes, which consequently resembled a bad case of measles. Now Somerfield itself appears to have become diseased after coming into close contact with "new" Labour, leaving the company with no choice but to axe its chief executive.

TOUGH words from treasury secretary Alistair Darling last week when he announced the formation of a 400-strong team to investigate benefits fraud, declaring: "We have to remain one step ahead of the cheats who are becoming increasingly organised."

One measure the Benefits Agency is taking to remain a step ahead is to force investigators to fill out a form before they can carry out surveillance, in-keeping with the new human rights legislation that came into effect on 1 April.

In the old days, when an investigator was tipped off that someone was ripping off the taxpayer, the investigator would simply follow the suspect, looking for evidence that could be critical in prosecuting an offender. Now they are required to fill out a detailed nine-page form which then has to be signed by a senior manager, an extremely time-consuming exercise, considering that in some areas there will be 20,000 referrals a year.

There is concern within the Benefits Agency that less fraud will be uncovered as investigators become bogged down in paperwork and managers refuse to authorise anything they are slightly concerned about. Under the old rules a good investigator could save the country around £500,000 a year. Now a hefty chunk of this money will be diverted back into paying the managers' overtime.

QUIETLY, late on the afternoon of Monday 27 March, the National Walking Strategy was delivered, stillborn, by the department of the environment, transport and the regions. A private burial took place immediately.

The walking strategy was conceived in 1998 as part of the highly publicised integrated transport policy. It would encourage people to make short journeys on foot instead of by car, reducing congestion, pollution and heart disease. But then DETR supremo John Prescott made his celebrated gaffe at the Labour conference – a car journey over the kind of distance the walking strategy would have targeted. Lord Macdonald of the RAC then replaced him at DETR and no doubt shuddered at the thought of giving pedestrians priority over cars in some areas of planning policy.

Much embarrassment was saved by downgrading the strategy to a mere advice note for local authorities and publishing it at 3.30pm, without even a press release.

THE Longbridge crisis is not only a crisis for Stephen Byers, the perpetually blinking trade and industry secretary. It marks something of a crisis for Midlands ministers who represent marginal seats, such as David Lock and Gisela Stuart.

As news of the BMW sell off began to sink in, Lock and Stuart abandoned their London desks and headed home, telling callers they were attending to "urgent business" in their constituencies.

'Backbiter'

Number crunchings

67

Number of deaths from Ecstasy in 10 years

613

Number of deaths from Paracetamol and Aspirin, in one year (1997)

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

WHEN Peter Mandelson was temporarily forced to resign from the government, Tony Blair was reluctant to see such a valued colleague wasting his talents. So Mandy was sent to discuss with his opposite number in the German government, Bodo Hombach, how their two parties could forge a Blair-Schroeder axis based on the German version of "the third way".

It is odd how many parallels emerge between the two men's careers. Like Mandelson, Hombach had been the *eminence grise* behind his leader's triumphant rise to power. He was rewarded with a job at the heart of the new Social Democrat government, as head of the chancellor's office. But last summer Schroeder's favourite fixer hit trouble rather worse than Mandy's problems over his mortgage. It was revealed by *Stern* magazine that, while head of a public company Hombach had handed over DM 300,000 of shareholders' money to a friend for no very clear reason.

He came under investigation for possible embezzlement (says Johannes Moken, the Dusseldorf state prosecutor: "there is a strong suspicion that Bodo Hombach has committed a criminal act"). Further rumours followed, including suggested murky dealings over the financing of building work at Hombach's Mulheim villa. Last June he resigned from the government.

But, as with Blair, Schroeder could not bear to see his friend's talents wasted. In the wake of the allies' glorious victory in Kosovo, he arranged for Hombach to be transferred to Brussels with a new job as "EU co-ordinator for the Balkans". This so astonished Schroeder's Christian Democrat Union opponents that one exclaimed: "Hombach doesn't even know where the Balkans are."

No sooner had he taken up his new post, however, than further scandals surfaced, including a suspicion of illegal dealings in Canadian real estate, prompting the CDU to demand Hombach's recall. The European parliament even announced that it planned to hold an investigation into the business affairs of the Balkan co-ordinator. But this was dropped on the suggestion of Herr Schroeder.

Not even in Brussels could Hombach avoid his weakness for money, it seems. In January he came under heavy fire for making what officials described as "megalomaniacal financial demands" for funding from the European commission (EC). Faced with a financial plan for the work of the co-ordinator's office, Chris Patten, the European union's (EU) commissar for external affairs, observed: "Whichever way you look at it, here we are dealing with far too large a sum of money."

It did not help when it was leaked that Hombach himself was seeking a monthly salary of DM 35,000 (£130,000 a year), plus an annual bonus of DM 74,000 which, it was reported in the German press, had been personally insisted on by Herr Schroeder.

All these financial demands, EU officials confirmed, were not *based* "on a valid concrete foundation" for the co-ordinator's plans to implement the EU's so-called Stability Pact in the Balkans. As Mr Patten explained: "There seem to be no clear projects for carrying out the Stability Pact". But again the German government intervened to ensure that Hombach could continue in post, spending such vast sums that several hundred million euros have had to be knocked off this year's common agricultural policy budget.

There has been remarkably little reporting on the progress of projects previously announced with fanfares of publicity. Meanwhile Hombach's name has dropped almost entirely out of the German media; although there are those who predict it may one day make a dramatic return.

● AS European union (EU) leaders planned their techno revolution in Lisbon with great fanfare, elsewhere the European parliament's constitutional affairs committee was discussing the treaty of Paris that will embrace the newly enlarged EU of Eastern European members.

Amazingly, a majority of MEPs, including those in the UK, voted in favour of a document which envisages one state with majority decision-making in all areas and control over law and commerce. The MEPs also agreed to give more power to the president of the recently disgraced commission.

The Earl of Stockton was one of the few UK MEPs who abstained from voting on proposals which will also abolish the British legal rights of habeas corpus and trial by jury in favour of one supreme European public prosecutor.

Smaller countries like Luxembourg, Greece and Portugal were also wary of the plan to substitute unanimous decisions with majority ones. But only a group of French MEPs of the Europe of Nations party, led by Georges Berthu, openly voiced alarm at this "superficially democratised superstate" with "coercive" powers. Mr Berthu described British MEPs as "pro-federalist".

Although the proposals will affect the future of all EU taxpayers, the MEPs' debate remained unreported by most Brussels-based hacks. Oddly, at the same time Tony Blair's mouthpiece Alastair Campbell was rebuking the BBC for "dumbing down" its coverage of the Lisbon summit, referring to everyone's "exasperation at how difficult it is to get serious coverage for serious issues". Doubtless when the Rev Blair signs this constitutional document he will tell us of the very serious issues it covers.

NOOKS and CORNERS

IT ISN'T often I agree with My Lord Rogers of Riverdance. In fact almost never. But for once I do. As he says about the budget: "It was disappointing we didn't get equalisation of VAT on refurbishment and new buildings. It's absolutely essential we do get it. Our towns and cities are full of buildings that need to be reused. That's a great disappointment to me."

Quite. Except I don't find Gordon Brown's indifference "disappointing" so much as outrageous.

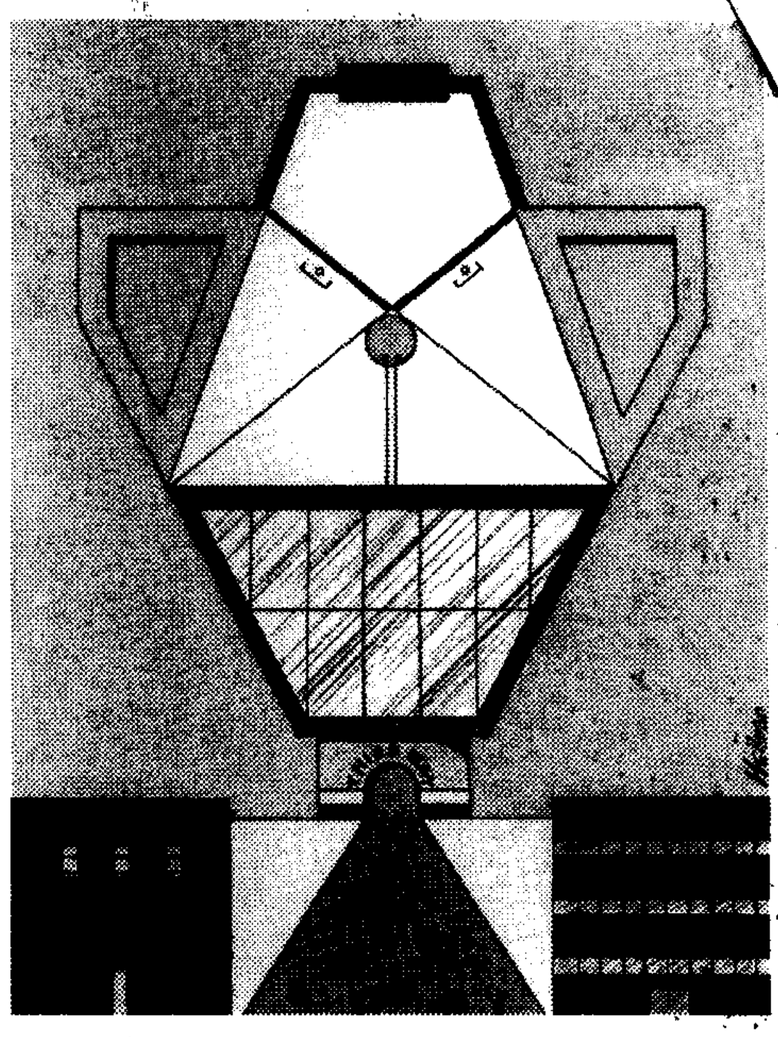
It would have cost the chancellor nothing to have ended the immensely destructive anomaly of taxing the repair and maintenance of existing buildings, whether listed or unlisted, at 17.5 percent but having new build zero-rated. And new build includes enlarging or buggering up an historic building.

As I have pointed out, this system seriously militates against the maintenance of our building stock, historic or otherwise. To the hard-up owner of a listed house — a building whose continuing existence whether in town or country benefits us all — or to the struggling parish council trying to repair a medieval church, this is serious, perhaps insuperable discouragement.

At the stroke of a pen the chancellor could have equalised VAT on *all* building work, whether repair or new build. This would have the virtue of fairness as well as encouraging the maintenance of listed buildings — which otherwise might have to be rescued with central government grant aid, or lottery money if there is any (which there isn't, because it's all gone to the dome).

My Lord Rogers' urban task force recommended a flat rate of 5 percent across the board, and very good advice that was. And it has been ignored. So much for all that sucking up to "new" Labour and Tony Blair. Still, at least Rogers got his peerage.

As the president of the RIBA and Rogers' partner Marco Goldschmeid also commented: "Once again the treasury has missed the point." And the RIBA rightly notes that, with his current surplus, the chancellor could have taken measures to ensure we build in a more sustainable way. These would include reducing VAT on architectural services: "At present these are rated at 17.5 percent when commissioned separately but zero-rated when part of a design build package, encouraging clients to underestimate the true value of good design" and, more to the point, encouraging them to build cheap rubbish rather than employ a half-decent architect. And, of course, reducing VAT on refurbishment of existing properties: "With newly built houses currently zero-rated, the tendency is for developers to cover green fields with new estates." Quite.



MY PICTURE is a shameless plug for Louis Hellman. And why not, seeing as he has sometimes illustrated this column.

Hellman is a brilliant cartoonist and an architect who satirises and deflates architects in all their posturings and arrogance by drawing them in the manner of their own style or as if made of elements of their buildings. Mies, Corb, Rogers, Zaha... he has done them all, and now all these portraits are collected in one useful book, called Archi-Têtes. The id in the grid [Wiley-Academy].

But I choose to illustrate not Hellman's caricature of a fashionable architect, or even the one of Lord Rogers, but his view of President Blair. "On the surface," he writes, "Blair seems to have reversed the Philistinism of Thatcher by proclaiming support for the arts and 'culture', but in fact continues to cut grants and rely on the lottery." The Archi-tête drawing shows Blair's sanctimonious, grinning face as "a New Labour HQ, approached by the Third Way and flanked by obsolete Old Labour Modernism and Conservative Neo-Classicism."

'Piloti'

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Middle-class home owners are set to escape in Tuesday's budget. The chancellor is understood to have rejected proposals to announce a big increase in stamp duty to cool the housing market."

— *Sunday Times*, 19 March, page 2

"As revealed by the *Sunday Times* in February, Gordon Brown increased stamp duty for homes worth more than £250,000 in the budget."

— *Sunday Times*, 26 March, front page, Money section

DOWN ON THE FARM

HATS OFF to Shropshire trading standards officers, who are threatening that anyone in Shropshire who sells meat imported from abroad labelled as "British" will face criminal prosecution for misleading the public.

But what is so odd about that? Merely that it is in fact perfectly legal to mislead shoppers by putting a "British" label on foreign-produced meat, so long as it is imported from the European union (EU).

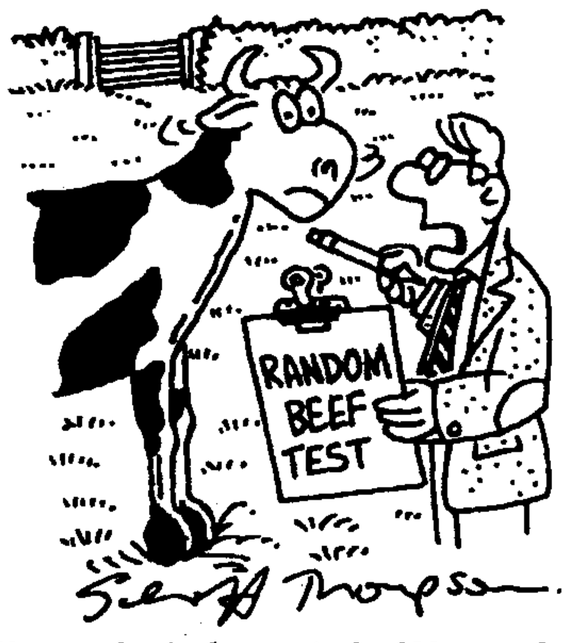
For months Shropshire's trading standards chief David Walker has been complaining to the meat and livestock commission (MLC) that foreign meat is being sold under its "British Meat" quality standard. The MLC just smugly points out that, under EU law, supermarkets are permitted to label meat as "British", even put a Union Jack on it, so long as it is "prepared" or packaged in Britain.

In recent weeks, as our farmers face their worst ever crisis, the penny has been dropping that these EU labelling laws are one of the major lunacies of our time. When Martin Pitt, a Wiltshire free-range egg producer, followed Delia Smith's advice by printing on his egg boxes the dates between which his eggs were laid (so cooks could know how fresh they were), he was prosecuted by the ministry of agriculture, fisheries and food.

EU law laid down that he could only print a "best before" date on the eggs themselves (his customers, including several top London hotels, also objected to this mandatory stamping of the eggs with indelible ink). When he was hauled before Devizes magistrates on criminal charges, with admirable commonsense they slung out MAFF's case. Mr Pitt's labels were factually correct and were therefore not misleading consumers. But MAFF appealed. The high court naturally upheld EU law, and Lord Justice Schiemann only ruled that Mr Pitt should not face criminal penalties since, thanks to the strain of the case, he had now retired.

When Tory MP Stephen O'Brien recently brought in a bill to insist that food should be correctly labelled with its country of origin, he won support from all sides of the House. He particularly won sympathy for his point that British pig producers are not allowed to explain that imported bacon and pork comes from pigs reared under welfare conditions which in Britain would be a criminal offence; and that it is legal to put a Union Jack on chickens imported via Italy from Thailand, filled with hormones which would actually be illegal anywhere in the EU. But the minister Joyce Quin explained that, since Mr O'Brien's bill was against EU law, it would be "an abuse of parliamentary process" for it to proceed.

'Even Newer Muckspreader'



"You – what's the capital of Venezuela?"

THERE is outrage among farmers – now there's something new – about a threat to the most sacred of farming institutions, the arable aid cheque.

Arable aid is meant to be paid on the actual area of crops grown. But, from the start of the IACS system in 1992, the ministry of agriculture, fisheries and food (MAFF) allowed farmers to claim on the total field area to the centre of the hedge or boundary because the Ordnance Survey measures fields that way. The only rule was that the field must be "fully planted according to normal agricultural practice".

Now the European union (EU) auditor has ordered MAFF to tighten up and limit this allowance to a maximum of two metres. If the distance from the boundary line to the crop is more than 2 metres – that is, four metres between adjoining crops – then the farmer can only claim on the true cropped area.

This seems to have upset lots of producers. *Farmers Weakly* has set up a hotline for farmers to complain and they have. "It is absolutely insane. It has involved me in undoing years of work growing wider hedges for wildlife corridors." "We're pulling out hedges we have only just planted."

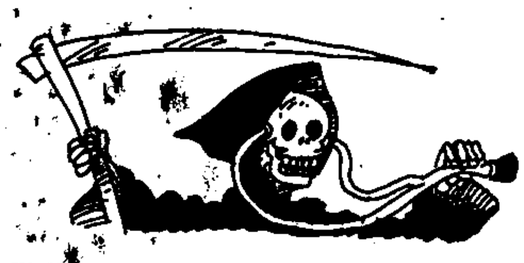
Leaving aside that four metres – 13 feet in English – is still a mighty thick hedge, all these reactions share one gripe: that MAFF is forcing farmers to reduce their field margins to a minimum with great loss to wildlife. The idea of accepting a tiny reduction in arable aid to save that wildlife has apparently not crossed any minds.

In fact the culture of handouts is so deep-rooted that few farmers will now conserve nature at all unless someone pays them to do so.

The Countryside Stewardship Scheme – excellent in its own way and widely supported by wildlife groups – only reinforces this idea; the tragedy is that something as essential to farming as stewardship of the land now requires a scheme at all.

None of this field boundary stuff will matter much in the arable deserts east of the M1, where most of the hedges are long gone. Many farmers there have achieved their ambition in efficient land use – that the wheat crops should actually brush against the Range Rover as they drive around the lanes. Of course, it's not always wheat – sometimes it's rape, the most appropriate crop for the British countryside.

'Gumboot'



DOING THE ROUNDS

Focus on psychiatry

HEALTH secretary Alan Milburn is trying to get some return on Labour's investment in the NHS by focusing on "sexy" high profile diseases such as heart disease and cancer. But the best test of any improvement will be if services improve for those at the bottom of the pile, such as mental illness.

Such patients need all the advocates they can get, but they are not helped by the gross ineptitude of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in engaging the media. When it was suggested to a senior member that he might like to appear on the *Today* programme, he answered: "What's the *Today* programme?"

And who has heard of the college's much untrumpeted Defeat Stigma campaign? As one consultant put it: "The college's indifference to the media works both ways, and so journalists go straight to organisations like MIND and SANE to get their quotes. In effect, psychiatrists are now even more stigmatised than their patients."

Aside from the private chain of celeb-haven Priory hospitals, there is only one publicly-known psychiatric institution: the Maudsley in London, which is part of the massive South London and Maudsley NHS trust covering 12 sites from SE1 to Croydon. The trust deserves its reputation for research but as a senior source claims: "We have some of the best consultants but a combination of poor management and lack of resources means that clinically standards are appalling on the wards."

Recently three junior doctors were absent through leave and sickness, out of a total of 11 covering a catchment area of more than 300,000 people. No locum was employed, leaving one of the wards (Alex Ground Floor at the Bethlem Royal Hospital in Beckenham) without any doctor on the ward for more than a week. During that time a patient died of a pulmonary embolus (clot in the lung).

It is impossible to say whether the patient would have survived had a junior doctor been on hand to diagnose the problem, but the absence cannot have helped. The chief executive Stewart Bell had been advised of the problem of absent locums three months previously and was warned that if nothing was done then "a serious untoward clinical incident" would occur.

The problem started when the management did away with the excellent local medical staffing officer in Croydon and dumped responsibility for finding locums on to an already over-pressed medical staffing office at the Maudsley itself. Staff there are unaware of the needs of Croydon and the manager had been on long term sick leave for more than six months.

A new medical staffing manager has now been appointed but the situation shows no sign of improving. Consultants now have to spend much of their time trying to arrange urgent cover because locums that have been promised fail to materialise. As one said: "This is obviously extremely dangerous and one wonders whether this is a covert way to save money by not having to pay for locums. It is particularly worrying given the management have been repeatedly warned this is dangerous and will keep getting repeated if they don't use the former medical staffing officer they moved in their chaotic reshuffle."

M.D.

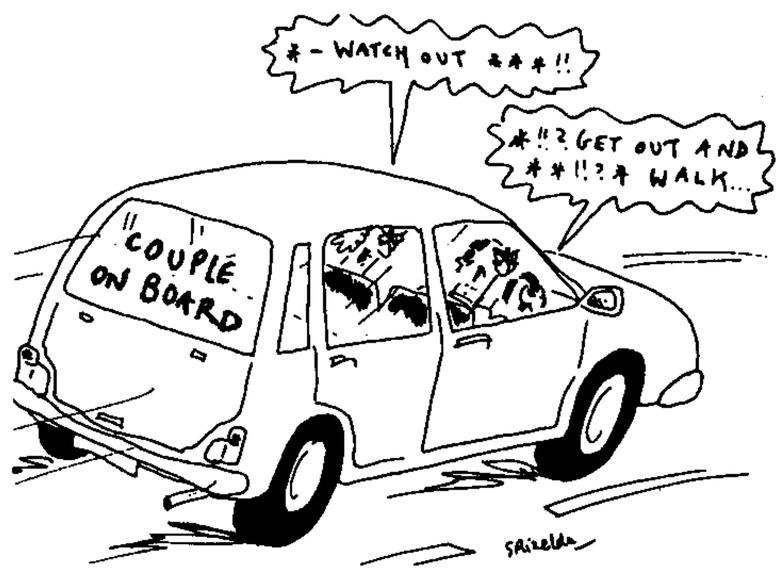
ROAD RAGE

THE reason for setting up the Commission for Integrated Transport has now become clear – to provide independent justification for the government to cave in to the roads lobby.

The CfIT is not part of that lobby. Its members are drawn from a cross-section of transport and business interests and give correspondingly balanced advice. But many are so cheesed off with the government cherry-picking the recommendations it wants to hear that they are close to resigning.

In November deputy PM John Prescott announced: "The Commission for Integrated Transport has advised me that there should not be a national road traffic reduction target. I agree." What the CfIT *really* said was that the national target would be unachievable without breaking it down into benchmarks for each different type of road – with an emphasis on urban roads – but it suited the government to interpret that as confirming a nationwide target was unachievable and should be ditched.

The CfIT's pre-budget advice that duty on road-



vehicle fuel should rise 2 percent above inflation – to generate £420m of ring-fenced cash for better public transport – was ignored. The treasury's alternative of raising duty by no more than inflation means the treasury will not give a penny of fuel revenue to public transport but stands to gain about £400m through increased VAT receipts at filling stations.

After the snub to the CfIT over fuel-duty, Prescott shamelessly made a post-budget statement that: "We are accepting a unanimous recommendation from the CfIT to allow 44-tonne lorries to operate on our roads". The CfIT had in fact agreed to those lorries provided their introduction was accompanied by mitigating measures for rail freight – of which there was no trace in the budget speech. Without those measures, about one-fifth of the goods now carried on rail could go by road when hauliers reap the financial benefits of the heavier lorries.

The CfIT had also recommended effective policing of truckers, whose costs would rise about 30 percent if they were unable to flout the law routinely.

The government clearly has no respect for the CfIT – but it does listen attentively to the bleating of the roads lobby. That lobby's own Lord Macdonald of the RAC, aka the minister for transport (*Eye* 997), told the Freight Transport Association shortly before the budget: "Your association's policy of constructive engagement backed by factual argument has been more successful than you might imagine." Now FTA members don't need to imagine the outcome – truckers have been promised yet another advantage over rail freight while their vast hidden subsidies (*Eye* 973) continue undiminished.

'Dr B. Ching'

■ ROTTEN BOROUGHS ■

BUNG DEAL

A FRIGHTENING example of how a secretive council can pull the wool over the eyes of its taxpayers emerges from Durham.

The Labour city council has put an extraordinary gloss on the humiliating renegotiation of its deal with joint venture partners Amec to build Walkergate, a grandiose and controversial entertainment complex (see *Eyes passim*).

At a meeting from which press and public were barred, the council's inaptly named strategic policy committee (strategy and policy are alien concepts in Durham) was presented with a report by senior officers which made it clear that Amec has the council over a barrel. The developers have exacted crippling financial concessions from Durham in exchange for going ahead with the scheme.

Centrepiece of Walkergate is a multiplex cinema, opposed by many Durham residents because a) the city already has a perfectly good four-screen one; and b) there are numerous others within a short drive. The report revealed that Amec and the proposed operator, Warner Villages, now have cold feet about it, too: "Amec have recently approached the council's officers indicating that as result of a downward turn in the commercial leisure market (particularly in relation to multiplex cinemas)"... they are unable to make "the minimum commitment... previously proposed".

Warner Villages is now demanding a "reverse premium" of £1.2m — in other words, the council has to give Warners a whopping unbudgeted-for bung in order to take on this white elephant. Meanwhile Amec will pay almost £1.7m less than previously agreed in exchange for Walkergate and other redevelopment sites in Durham.

In a magnificent understatement, the report notes: "Clearly the present proposal is disappointing." To the local press, however, it was presented as some sort of triumph. The *Northern Echo*, which was not given any of the financial details, merely carried a breezy report about how the meeting had "paved the way for building to start", followed by approving quotes from council leader Maurice Crathorne of the "good news for jobs" variety.

How will the council, whose finances were described as "critical" in a district auditor's report (*Eye* 993) at Christmas, cope? A cuts package of nearly £1m in services is on the way next year. But at least the £1m "millennium film" contract for chief executive Colin Shearsmith's tennis chum Brendan Quayle appears safe for now!

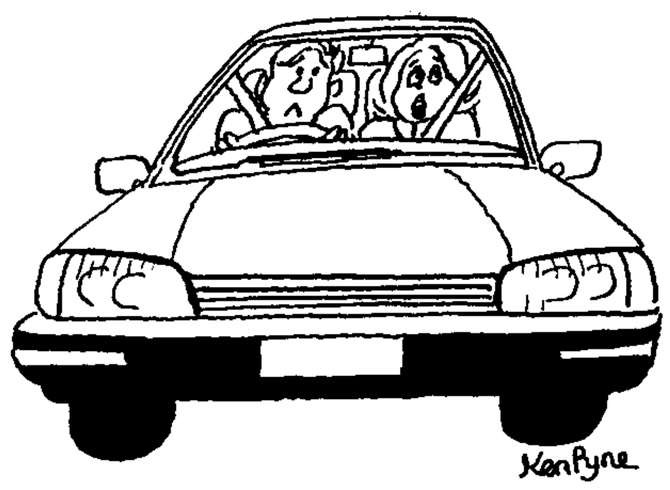
ROUGH TRADE

SKULDUGGERY on Michael Portillo's patch as rival Tories in Kensington and Chelsea battle it out for the council leadership vacancy caused by the elevation to the Lords of Joan Hanham.

Frontrunners are Cllr Merrick Cockell (policy: do very little, except keep highest council tax of any Tory London borough); and Cllr Daniel Moylan (policy: hang, flog, bring back stocks, etc). The contest is going to be very close indeed and any mathematical advantage is quickly seized upon.

One of Moylan's supporters, Dr Charles Tannock, became an MEP last year and was expected to resign from the council in due course. To ensure he went sooner rather than later the chief whip put him on three committees, ensuring that his burden of work was too great. Lo and behold, Tannock duly quit. By an amazing coincidence, Baroness Hanham officially resigned before any new candidate could be found to replace Tannock, thus giving the Cockell camp a useful numerical edge. And the chief whip who masterminded this nifty manoeuvre? Step forward... Cllr Merrick Cockell.

● **JUSTICE – of a sort – for Francis Williams, the Labour party auditor whose report on financial irregularities in the West Lancashire party (*Eyes passim*) earned him removal from the list of potential candidates for May's district council elections. The party then rejected Williams' "appeal" without hearing any evidence from him (*Eye* 992). Last week Williams won the right to a genuine appeal hearing at the party's Liverpool office, where impartial officials with no West Lancs connection heard his case. He was immediately reinstated as a potential candidate. Unfortunately Labour dragged out the matter for so long it is now too late for Williams to stand in any winnable seat.**



"We can't be far from London now — I've just heard someone talking about house prices"

TENDER TOUCH

LAST year, following a poor-to-middling Ofsted report on Haringey's efforts to improve its schools, "consultants" Capita were called in at a cost of £200,000 to report on the council's progress.

While the six-strong Ofsted team produced a coherent 40-page report after being in the borough for two weeks, 14 Crapita staff have been there since November and have managed so far to produce just four sides of A4, full of "new" Labourish catchphrases. During the process council officers have caught Crapita out several times for not reading reports, background papers and emails.

One precondition of Crapita getting the contract to produce its report was that it would not be allowed to tender for any education services which ended up being "outsourced" as a result. Why, then, has it demanded — and been given — confidential information on the names, dates of birth, job titles, length of service, salaries and pension entitlements of scores of staff? If Crapita had not already agreed otherwise, it would look as if it were attempting to get into pole position for taking over the provision of services itself.

● **LABOUR bosses in Leeds still think they know better than the electorate who should sit on the city council. They have picked John Clare, protégé of ex-council leader George Mudie, to fight the Harehills ward in a by-election on 13 April. Former councillor Clare was dumped by voters last May after being foisted on local party members who wished to deselect him in favour of an Asian candidate. His campaign was not helped by his chairmanship of a council-backed training outfit, CHEL, which mislaid some £150,000 of taxpayers' money (*Eyes* 974 & 977). At the by-election Clare is up against Javed Akhtar, the man who was poised to replace him last year until the Harehills party was suspended under the little-known rule that meetings cannot be held in Ramadan. Akhtar took his bat home and is now standing for the Lib-Dems.**

I.T. HITS THE FAN

AN INTERESTING unpublished document finds its way to the *Eye* detailing Doncaster council's excursion into the computer business in the early 1990s.

It reveals how the authority's IT arm, Doncaster Computer Services (DCS), bought hardware and software at big discounts and sold them on to chums of the council, including a Mr N. Hayes, son of the deputy chief constable of South Yorkshire; Mr M. Poy, a Doncaster solicitor; Mr M Glarvey, former assistant director of DCS; and Mr C. Jeynes, the council's former chief executive.

The latter, for instance, paid £4,026.24 for computer equipment for which the council had paid £3,985.33 — a splendid profit of £40.41. A confidential internal memo to the director of Doncaster audit services, dated 8 July 1994, concluded that such sales were *ultra vires* and should stop.

The identity of a sixth beneficiary of the council's largesse is intriguing. In late 1991 "the former director of financial services, now chief executive, allowed his former wife to purchase computer hardware and software from Doncaster Computer Services". Like many computer purchasers she experienced difficulties with her new toy, and two visits were made to her London home by council technicians. No charge was made, and the £241.78 cost was "absorbed" by the authority.

The then chief executive was Doug Hale, who took early retirement when the Donnygate scandal broke in 1997. His former wife is the eponymous head of the high-powered local government finance consultancy Rita Hale Associates — someone who might have been imagined to have a clearer view of the proprieties of public funding.

"Tell you what... banks aren't as popular as they used to be"

WATER WORLD

NORTH West Water has generously decided to help the struggling farming industry by bringing charges for supplying water to field troughs without meters into line with metered troughs.

In 1996 a connection to the mains cost farmers just £30 a year. The following two years saw a slight increase of just over 3 percent to £31 and £32 respectively.

By 1999, however, NW Water had decided that lowly water troughs were an untapped source of wealth and increased the charge by a whopping 47 percent to £47. Another 47 percent increase to £69 this year has left farmers wondering if in a few years' time it will prove too expensive to water their livestock.

LOVIS FOR LONDON – 4 May 2000 KNIFE & PACKER

THIS MAYORAL ELECTION IS ALL VERY WELL BUT...
IT'S GOT TO BE ABOUT POLICIES, NOT PERSONALITIES
FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO LATTÉ GO QUIN!
QUIN FOR MAYOR
YAH, RIGHT
GET QUIN IN!

TV

City Hospital (BBC1)
Doctors (BBC1)

THE main target in Chris Morris's strange and brilliant new Channel 4 series Jam is doctors. Sketch after sketch targets society's reverence for medics with a reassuring manner. This doesn't immediately feel like topical comedy – doctors have been around for a long time – but a glance at the rest of the schedules shows how fitting Morris's obsession is.

Fighting for audience share, BBC1 would be a stretcher-case without the ratings insulin of *Casualty* and its even more entertainingly ridiculous spin-off *Holby City*. As those two hit medico dramas depart for summer recuperation, the channel uses as a bandage two more blue-light dramas – one factual, one fictional – running daily each morning.

City Hospital – ward and theatre reports presented live from Southampton hospital each day by Shauna Lowry and Nick Knowles – is a Chris Morris sketch masquerading as fact. In one day's opening shot, an anaesthetised patient lies in the foreground, while Shauna, in surgical scrubs, addresses the camera.

"This is my first operation on the show," she giggles. "You're going to see this operation live on the show." In this respect, she is John Motson to her co-presenter's Des Lynam. Nick will say solemnly: "And now back live to the operating theatre where Barbara Taylor's knee operation is about to begin." Shauna then giggles: "I'm really looking forward to this." As surgery proceeds, she breathlessly announces that "Dr Barrett is inside the knee!"

At this point – in a moment of pure Morris – the surgeon turned away from the patient and gave his attention to Shauna's interview. "You don't mind me interrupting?" interrupts Shauna. "Not at all," the smoothiechops doctor reassures her. In a comedy sketch, the patient would at this point go into trauma, dying live on TV while the surgeon attends to his personal PR.

It was to minimise such risk that the producers had chosen a routine operation but even they can fail and the possibility of such a terrible outcome points up the wrongheadedness of offering operations as live entertainment.

The metaphor of football coverage seems to have infected everyone. Presenter Nick even uses the soccer player's favourite modifier "to be fair". Introducing a patient admitted with a catastrophic skin rash, he describes it as a "very rare – and, to be fair, distressing – condition." The patient seemed to have spent too much of her confinement watching *ER* and confided that she was being helped in her rare and distressing condition by "big hugs from my husband".

"Strong language, nudity, sex and violence or do you want to watch TV"

Beyond the dubious morality of serving up actual pain as soap opera, *City Hospital* raises another ethical worry. With the recent combination of scandals about medical competence – Bristol heart doctors, Harold Shipman –and the raging political debate over funding, the NHS has never been more controversial. But, on the evidence of the opening editions at least, *City Hospital* nervously ignores both issues, favouring "rare – and, to be fair, distressing" conditions over funding and presenting doctors as laconically patient saints.

The new daily soap **Doctors** suggests that the drama department has had an imagination bypass. Like *Casualty* and *Holby City*, it is made and set in Birmingham. Indeed, the implication is that the GPs in whose practice the series is set are the ones referring to hospital the people who become storylines in the evening soaps.

Casualty perfected a highly efficient form of television narrative in which a series of fragmented scenes offer verbal or visual hints – a boiling pan near to where a child plays, a builder muttering to his foreman that he don't like going up ladders in high winds – of the plots to be featured this week. Indeed, though technically drama, *Casualty* and *Holby* are really a game show – *Who Wants To Be A Hospital Admission Clerk?* – in which the viewer is invited to diagnose what the patients will have wrong with them this week.

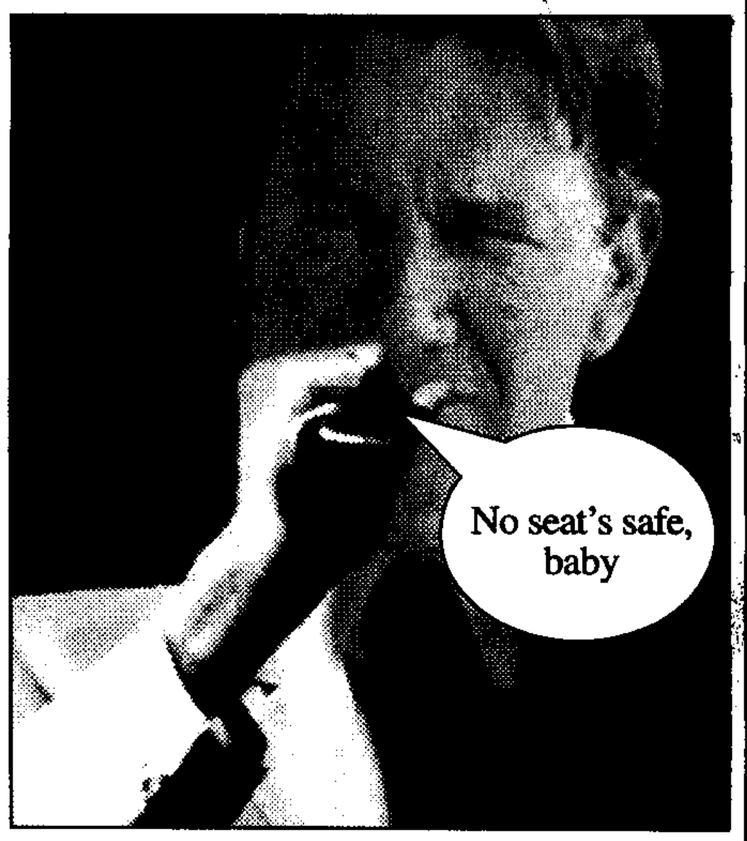
Doctors proceeds on the same basis. It is highly entertaining but the narrative trick is now so established that hospital soaps have lost the art of surprise. The casual moment has become impossible. The man coming into the surgery for his holiday jabs tries to be casual about it – the scriptwriter tries to make him seem a minor character – but we know he wouldn't be there unless he were going to have an extreme allergic reaction to the vaccine and collapse, which indeed he does.

But the thing is irritatingly addictive. Although posing as pro-NHS, *Doctors* may well bankrupt state medicine. Positioned at 12.30pm each day, it's perfect sickbed viewing. Flu victims will be extending their time off work by a few days to see a storyline played out. As BBC1 coughs and splutters from the multi-channel virus, medicine keeps it alive.

'Square Eyes'

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore



George Michael Portillo

MEDIA NEWS

HAVING emerged blinking into the daylight, the prime minister's official spokesman Alastair Campbell is set to disappear again.

Although the spindoctor-in-chief was happy to collaborate with BBC documentary maker Michael Cockerell in a "fly on the wall" programme, Campbell had not reckoned on the pique his decision provoked among the objects of his daily wrath – the scribbling lobby hacks. If Campbell was prepared to allow Cockerell to film him, why couldn't they as journalists attribute comments to him directly?

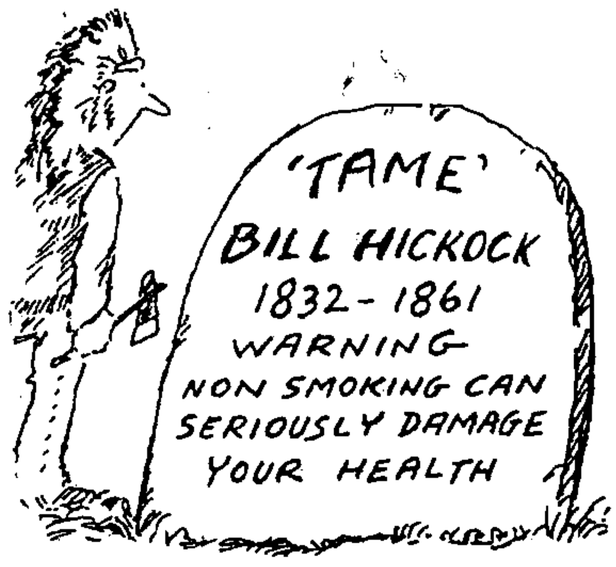
Campbell duly obliged, with the *Guardian* devoting a full page record to a testy and impenetrable lobby briefing in which Campbell was repeatedly quoted mouthing his ritual evasions and disclaimers. But now Campbell has realised that not all publicity is good publicity. He has written to newspaper and political editors asking not to be named from now on.

LUVVIES

"Well, I think that Clueless was very deep... I think it was deep in the way that it was very light. I think lightness has to come from a very deep place if it's true lightness."

ALICIA SILVERSTONE
Electronic Telegraph

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.



O·B·N

What's your proudest achievement?
Getting Greg Dyke, Matthew Bannister and Alan Yentob to audition for BBC Talent.

Who do you most admire in broadcasting?
See above.

ANGIE STEPHENSON (BBC Talent Exec.)
Broadcast Magazine

Nominated by Gareth Randall.

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

LOTTERY BALLS

UNDER increasing fire over the huge reserve of unspent national lottery cash – £3.74bn, or 41 percent of all the money earmarked for good causes – culture secretary Chris Smith wrote to the *Daily Mail* on Friday 24 March denying that there was a lottery logjam.

"More than £2bn of the money in the fund has already been committed and will soon be paid out," he claimed.

Three days later, on 27 March, the figures changed dramatically. "Although there is £3.5bn in the national lottery distribution fund," he told the Commons, "94 percent of that – more than £3bn – has been committed."

Can he really have "committed" an extra billion quid over the weekend? Since Smith went on to complain that there had been much "erroneous press reporting", perhaps he should check that it isn't his own department that has made the mistake.

AS THE national lottery commission considers Camelot's bid to run the lottery until 2008, it should bear in mind the company's talent for creative writing.

In its advertising for the National Lottery Big Draw 2000 Camelot promised "More guaranteed millionaires than ever before". The number of millionaires created is, however, irrelevant, according to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA).

The ASA did not uphold a complaint made last December that Camelot lacked sufficient funds to back up this claim, arguing that: "Because Camelot had never previously guaranteed a millionaire, they only needed to create one millionaire to be justified in using the claim 'More guaranteed millionaires than ever before'."

Plugged In

"Forget the Oscars, Britain will be giving the Academy Awards a run for their money with a pre-BAFTA party to die for.

Guests at the bash, to be hosted by New York media queen Tina Brown and Sky boss Elisabeth Murdoch, include Madonna, Cameron Diaz, Liz Hurley, Michael Caine, Sam Mendes, Glenn Close, Tom Cruise, Nicole Kidman... and me.

It all takes place at the trendy St Martin's Lane Hotel the night before the ceremony. The show itself is live on Sky Premier on Sunday, April 9 at 6.30pm."

'Bizarre', *The Sun*

Nominated by Nick Marshall.

An occasional column devoted to cross-media plugs masquerading as news.

FUCKWATCH

Kelvin Mackenzie

***SUNDAY BUSINESS* revealed last month that Kelvin MacKenzie had set up a "share club" for senior *Mirror* executives in 1997. "MacKenzie... never talked to the City Slickers about what investments to make," it reported. "'You couldn't ask for anything more innocent than a share club,' he said."**

This brief quote scarcely does justice to MacKenzie's telephone interview with *Sunday Business* hack Mark Watts. Fortunately, the *Eye* has obtained a rather fuller transcript of their resonant and poetic dialogue. Eat your heart out, Harold Pinter...

Is that Kelvin Mackenzie?

Yeah, what the fuck you want?

It's Mark Watts from Sunday Business newspaper. On the Mirror share dealing affair.

Just tell me what you fucking want.

I gather that you're a member of a share club along with Charlie Wilson and David Montgomery.

All the directors of the Mirror Group, yeah, were in the share club...

When did it start?

When did it start? What fucking interest is it of yours anyway by the way? Just tell me what the story is, you're such a fucking great journalist, just tell me what the story is.

I just wanted to find out about it. I gather that it—

Yeah, but what is the point? What is the point of the story? How many share clubs are there in Britain? The reason you are doing it, why don't you talk to your fucking editor, right, right? Why don't you fucking talk to him you big cunt, instead of coming on here trying to fucking strongarm me, all right?... Why don't you go and have a word with Mr Randall [*Sunday Business* editor Jeff Randall]?

I speak to him all the time.

Go and talk to him now, you big cunt.

[MacKenzie slams down phone. Watts calls again.]

Hello.

Is that Kelvin MacKenzie?

It might be.

It's Mark Watts again at Sunday Business.

I've got the letter here. I've spoken to Jeff, so he'll be talking to you in a minute. It was folded up in the June of '99. We paid £60 a month each. You'll be pleased to know – cos you couldn't spot a fucking elephant wandering down Oxford Street – that we lost £18.38... Honestly mate, you are wasting your fucking time... There's something wrong with you blokes, isn't there? You wouldn't know a story, would you? You wouldn't know a fucking story. Speak to Randall. Go fuck yourself.

[MacKenzie slams down phone again, but then sends Watts a fax and rings him back.]

I got your fax. Thanks for that.

Yeah. Any other questions?

Not at the moment, no. I'll come back to you if anything arises.

What's it all about? I mean I know the point you're trying to make. A share club, you couldn't ask for anything more innocent than a share club... Well, unfortunately, unfortunately for you I suppose, we ended up losing bloody money.

Pseuds Corner

Mariella Frostrup is one of the UK's best-known broadcasters and journalists. She has presented many television programmes including Brunch (Channel 5), At the Movies (Sky Movies), The Nation's Favourite Song Lyric (BBC) and the British Evening Standard Film Awards (Carlton). She has also presented her own show on BBC GLR, Sunday Brunch (Radio 5) and the Kaleidoscope Bob Marley Special (Radio 4). Mariella Frostrup appears regularly on Parkinson's Sunday Morning BBC Radio Show and recently co-hosted the Empire Film Awards.

As a respected arts critic, Mariella Frostrup has sat on the panels of various awards including the Orange Prize for Fiction, the Evening Standard Film Awards, the Esquire Non-Fiction Awards and the London Film Festival. She previously wrote a column for the *Sunday Times* and is now film critic for the *News of the World* and a book reviewer for the *Mail on Sunday*.

Press release announcing this year's Booker Prize judges

Sarah Lucas also hesitates over a nationalistic definition of her work. Her self-portrait Human Toilet Revisited – a photo of herself sitting smoking on a closed toilet seat – will be in Tate Britain's inaugural exhibition. Could its subject be seen as a British preoccupation? "Yes, but everyone uses the toilet. It's hard to say what Britishness is these days because so many things are global."

ROSE AIDIN
Sunday Times Culture Section

We're all dancing now, which makes us that much more powerful. We're not scared of dancing. I'm an omnidancer, pretty much anything makes me dance. What I'm wearing at the moment I call my Rutland anti-hunting outfit. It's beautiful dog-tooth check and it's got a kind of skirt at the back with a multiple zipped sleeveless vest. It's a weird combination. Whenever I go into a petrol station people will do a turn, but I don't look weird. I look more like I'm wearing something that hasn't quite become fashionable.

JULIAN COPE
Metro

What is your car?
It's a sculpture called Mini, Escort that features a Mini magnified by 30% parked next to a normal sized Escort.
How did the idea come about?
I wanted to swap the scales of two objects... I wanted people to recognise the shape but also realise that something has changed. You've got to decide if it's the Mini that's different or the Escort.
Have you worked with cars before?
My next piece, opening in April, is a van parked in a living room. With this work I'll be challenging the idea of placement and context.

ELIZABETH WRIGHT
"Me and My Motor", Guardian

"Within the Spice Girls... you don't get to sing the whole song. And for me, I'm such an artist that I want to tell the story and I want to express the emotion and how I feel about every word in the song."

MEL C (Sporty Spice)
Daily Mail

CONTRIBUTORS: Lord Gnome, Aubrey Suckerman, Roz Morris, Bill Moore, Anon.

£10 paid for entries

Rover Dealer Career Challenge,
Yelverton Hall,Framingham Earl Rd,Yelverton..

Telephone Directory

Letters

Private Eye

Taking the Michael

Sir,

I read with some amusement your report that "Winner's expensive habits include eating out regularly at Rupert Murdoch's expense". Would it were true! If you have any influence in this matter, I would appreciate your exercising it for me.

I do not get paid one penny reimbursement of expenses for eating, hotel bills or travelling undertaken to produce my Sunday Times column Winner's Dinners. In fact, if you added up the cost of these items that I pay personally, they would vastly exceed what I receive for writing the column!

But that's how it is in the world. Some of us have to suffer in order that others can live in greater freedom.

All good wishes.

Yours sincerely,
MICHAEL WINNER MA (Cantab),

London W1.

Lookalike

Young

Toksvig

Sir,

Is the stonewalling in the Lords over Section 28 connected to the resemblance between lesbian comedienne Sandi Toksvig and Conservative Baroness Young?

Yours,
OWEN MASSEY,

Loughborough, Leics.

Doesn't add up

Sir,

M.D. continues to rant on about audit (Eye 998) while only giving half the story. Why will he not point out that audit, and any patient-derived information, only applies directly to those it was gathered from? If I saw published audit data from two surgeons, or two hospitals, showing that one had a higher complication rate or mortality rate than the other, it would tell me little about the relative skills of the personnel concerned. It is always possible that the surgeon with the apparently better results would, if he (most surgeons are male) had operated on the other set of patients, have had even worse results. The surgeon with the better results is perhaps the one who leaves the sickest patients to die without surgery, so that they don't upset his precious surgical audit data.

If basic audit data is put up on a web-site for every journalist and his dog to read, who is going to ensure that they take these factors into account before they start a witch-hunt against the surgeons with apparently poorer results. If you put full data up, to allow more balanced judgements, then, as a common or garden GP, I would not trust my own abilities to interpret it clearly, let alone the abilities or even the inclination of the average hack to do so. Or will we have the spectacle of MD promoting the dissemination of audit data, while Hackwatch chronicles the hysteria it generates?

DR JON GURR,

Almondbury, Huddersfield.

THE NEW ORTHODOXY

WHILE other 18 year olds are spending far too much time in the pub, Timothy Fielding is intent on making the Tory Party a farce to be reckoned with in his town. *Formby Times*

Splotting our copybook

Sir,

Re: The Goodway Life. I am very happy to let your readers (and the district auditor if she is interested) know that I never discussed at the charity's board meetings of the Star Leisure Centre in Splott, Cardiff, the work I was privileged to do as chairman of the Independent Commission on Councillors' Allowances – a possibility which worried you.

What really worries me, though, is that you are misguided enough to think the commission was somehow wrong in ending the attendance allowances and paying councillors' allowances "as if they were employees". Have you never studied the government white paper on modernising local government?

Yours,
EWART PARKINSON,

Chairman, Independent Commission on Councillors' Allowances, Cardiff.

Nooks & Cornered

Sir,

I have been shown a copy of your edition of 25 February 2000, in which, under the heading Nooks and Corners, Piloti mentions the proposed modifications to the area outside the west front of Llandaff Cathedral.

Piloti makes a gross error of fact, whether from carelessness or malice I would not know; the chancellor to whom the faculty petition is addressed is not the chancellor of the cathedral, Canon Lodwick, who is indeed an interested party as a member of chapter, but the chancellor of the diocese, the bishop's senior legal advisor, a layman, to whom jurisdiction has now been given, under recent Church in Wales legislation, over the cathedral as well as over all the other churches of the diocese.

The West Front proposal is one of several faculty petitions from the chapter which have recently been submitted. Secondly, a question: what is the point of this inaccurate and malicious journalism? There might be some who would admire your cleverness in making a black satirical mountain out of a modest molehill of local aesthetic disagreement, but for myself I find this kind of performance contemptible and can only wonder why intelligent, not to say Christian, people should spend their time and energy on such purely destructive pursuits.

Yours faithfully,
THE VENERABLE MARTIN WILLIAMS,

The Archdeacon of Margam, Merthyr Tydfil, Mid Glamorgan.

All steamed up

Sir,

Mr Roger Fisken's e-mail "Seeds of Discontent" in your last issue calls the research of the respected research scientist (with over 270 published papers to his name) "a pile of steaming horse shit". Strange that 40 or so earlier non GM papers of experiments conducted in the same way as the GM tests were eagerly accepted by industry.

When Dr Pusztai refused to discredit the worrying results he was immediately sacked, his research confiscated and under threat he was forbidden to talk about his work or even defend himself. Luckily for democracy 24 of the best international scientists took a stand, reviewed his data and backed it as good quality.

Yours,
JON WALKER,

Via e-mail.

Old acquaintance

Sir,

I read your review of the British Council's and Vintage's New Writing Nine with interest, and a great deal of pleasure, for you singled out my story for special praise.

You did, however, give the British Council a fair lashing for "the glorious assemblage of favours done and old pals' acts that is the annual New Writing volume," and came to the sad conclusion that the anthology represents: "New writing, then, but not, alas, by new writers."

I do feel in a position where I must express myself, just to put the record straight. My experience of trying to get poetry and short stories published has been that the literary world is indeed made up of manifold and appalling cliques. So when I submitted my story to New Writing, I was perfectly prepared for the standard rejection letter. I had absolutely no connection with anyone on the editorial board or with the publishing house responsible for the anthology. I was delighted that my contribution was accepted.

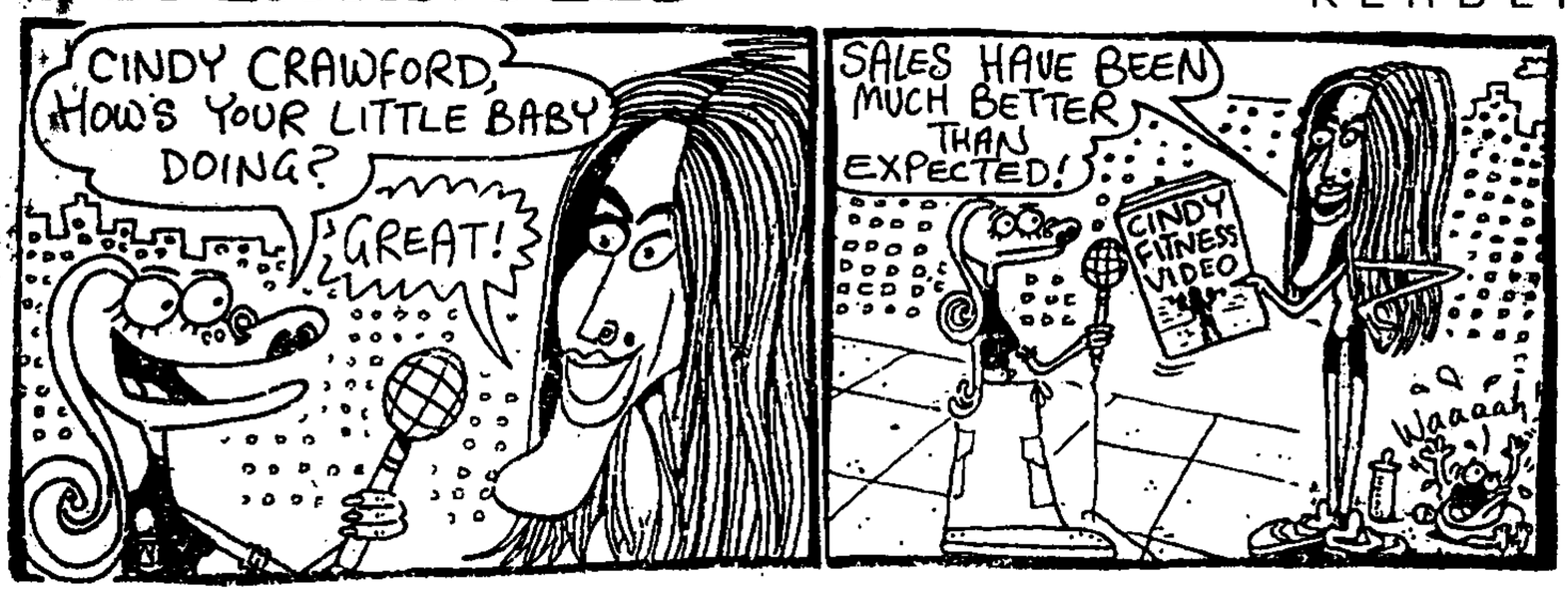
I do feel that by its nature New Writing does in fact do the exact opposite of what the writer of your article implied: it offers the "striving unknowns" a platform where their work can be read, appreciated and noticed, alongside writers of a certain reputation.

Yours sincerely,
VIVIENNE VERMES,

Via fax.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER



I-SPY

Eurostar Terminal, Waterloo

Submitted by John Beynon.

£10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

Thribb tickling

Sir,

At the risk of coming over all Walter-esque, may I point out that E.J. Thribb's In Memoriam for Nicolas Walter (Eye 998) contained two errors.

Firstly, Walter was never President of the National Secular Society. He was, however, a former Vice President of that organisation. Secondly, his first name should have been spelled without an "h".

Yours faithfully,
DAN J. BYE,

Sheffield.

Irving Berlin

Sir,

Even in an organ as amusing as yours, the piece (998) about David Irving addressing the judge as "Mein Führer" is just too funny to be believed. Come on, admit it. You made it up, didn't you? (Please say you didn't.)

Best wishes,
ARTHUR HALL,

Goring-by-Sea, W. Sussex.

We didn't. Ed.

Lookalike

Dipsy

Princess

Sir,

Get ahead, get a hat — was this Princess Michael at Westminster Cathedral this week — or Dipsy of the Teletubbies?

Yours truly,
WENDY MOORE,

Hockley, Essex.

Polls apart

Sir,

In Letters (Eye 998) Lance Mitchell asked if the "contest between Gush and Bore is a reflection on US society as a whole?"; I can tell him it is just as much a reflection as the upcoming general election between Tony Blur and William Vague reflects on British society as a whole. Not a lot, I fear.

VIC McINNIS,

Via e-mail.

From Bader to worse

Sir,

Re: "No Leg To Stand On", Letters 998. Do your homework, Morley, before trying to show off your (lack of) knowledge.

Douglas Bader's girlfriend, Sally, first seen at a 23 Squadron dance at RAF Kenley in November 1931 was indeed played by Beverley Brooks; later "Bubbles" Rothermere.

Bader's first wife, Thelma Edwards, whom he first met at "The Pantiles" tea room at Godalming in the spring of 1932 whilst recovering from his bump, was played by the delightful Muriel Pavlow.

CHRISTOPHER HACKETT,

Chief Pilot, Top Flight Aerobatics, Leicester. (Bader Buff and occasional "Ace of the Base"!)

"I remember when the Sirens' song alone was enough to entice men"

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"People will look at Bowyer and Woodgate and say 'Well, there's no mud without flames'."
GORDON TAYLOR, Talk Sport
(Tony Kinsella)

"Kevin Keegan said if he had a blank sheet of paper, five names would be on it..."
ALVIN MARTIN, Talk Sport
(Gavin Savage)

Caller: *It's Will Carling.*
Mounce: *What made you think it was him?*
Caller: *His voice.*
DOUGLAS MOUNCE, BBC Radio Devon
(Mike Smith)

"That's twice that has happened in the recent future..."
MURRAY WALKER, ITV
(Val French)

Letter from Colombia
from Our Own Correspondent

WHEN God was creating the world, goes a joke we like to tell ourselves, an angel began to chastise him for giving Colombia preferential treatment. Surely it wasn't fair to the rest of the world to make one country so beautiful and give it such rich reserves of gold, emeralds and oil?

"Ah," said the Lord. "Just wait till you see the people I'm going to give it to!"

So that's why we've messed it up. Of course we Colombians would rather blame anyone else, including God, for the fact that even in a continent with some stiff competition we're the biggest basket-case of all.

We'd like to be known for the magical realism of our Nobel prize-winning writer, "Gabo" Garcia Marquez. Unfortunately, "reality" is not so magical: one of the worst rates of murder and kidnapping anywhere, corruption that takes your breath away and 40 years of guerrilla conflict. There is also the not-so-small matter of being the world's number one producer of cocaine.

The white powder has long been our most lucrative, albeit illegal, export thanks to your investment bankers, ad executives, media types and celebrities. But now we are not just processors, we also grow most of it as well. And — here's the magical bit — the more everyone tries to eradicate the crop, the more we grow! Our army dropped more planeloads of pesticides last year than ever before, but yields from the coca fields are estimated to have increased by at least a quarter.

Something, clearly, is not working. But Andrew Pastrana, our TV newsreader-turned-president, and his Gringo friends seem gamely ready to employ more of the same tried, tested and failed tactics. Their plan, which went before the US congress last week, is to throw another $1.6bn of military hardware and more American "advisers" at the coca fields and the heavily armed, nominally leftist FARC guerrillas who live off protecting them. No one doubts that they had more chance of winning in Vietnam.

Pastrana's other big idea is yet another effort at making peace with the FARC and its ageing leader, Manuel "Sureshot" Marulanda, who must be laughing up his sleeve: one of the concessions to Sureshot is a demilitarised area the size of Switzerland as a safe haven for his 15,000 well-clad troops. Just the job for shipping more coke and planning more assaults and kidnappings, now running at ten a day.

The FARC will never win the war or run the country – and why would they want to when they live so nicely off their illegal rackets? - but they could hardly do a much worse job than the bunch we have in power now. After revelations that our last president had himself elected thanks to a hefty injection of drugs money, it takes a lot to surprise us these days about corruption. Even so, eyebrows were raised at congress's latest blatant fiddles. Officials awarded themselves and their cronies $2.7m in dodgy contracts in just two days, including $50,000 on toilet paper.

None of this mattered too much until our economy, which had survived in spite of everything, went down the tubes last year. Now investors do not want to know and our rich folk cannot get to Miami quick enough. Peasants have fewer options, caught in the crossfire between the FARC and rightist militias with shadowy links to the military who fight for control of the drugs trade. The UN pleads for respect for human rights, long since forgotten here as a bad joke.

As the turf wars escalate, massacre after massacre takes place in that beautiful countryside we were given. Government planes return from rural areas with the bodies of our police and conscripted soldiers. This is what they mean by a peace process in the middle of war: lots of establishment bigwigs kow-towing to the FARC, interspersed with regular shipments of coffins. Another 15 came out of the jungle this week. It is awful, but we have been more exercised by a football match with mighty Brazil. And this is our final tragedy: not that we do these things to each other, but that we now no longer even seem to notice.

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH

"The fire department were very apologetic" Cecilia Perry told reporters outside her home in Landover, Maryland, "and so they should have been. The fire only caused minor damage, but by the time the firefighters had finished fighting each other, my house was a wreck."

Perry was speaking after a violent confrontation between volunteer firemen from two rival fire stations had broken out in her house. "I discovered a small carpet fire in an upstairs bedroom, so I immediately called the fire service. Then some neighbours helped me to fight the flames, and we managed to put the fire out with a few buckets of water. About twenty minutes later, two fire engines turned up outside the door, one from Seat Pleasant firehouse, and another one from Ritchie. I told them that the emergency was over, but both crews insisted on coming inside, and they started arguing about whose fire it was. Before I could stop them, fists were flying, and they were knocking each other to the ground. Someone punched a hole through a wall, chairs were broken, my budgie went flying through the window in its cage, blinds were pulled down, the front and back doors were wrenched off their hinges, and the walls were scarred and marred up. There was blood everywhere by the time they left, and several of them had to be taken to Prince George's Hospital Center to have stitches."

Captain Chauncey Bowers, a spokesman for the county fire department, later admitted: "this wasn't our finest hour. It's obviously unprofessional behaviour, and unfortunately gives a black eye to all the volunteers who fight fires in this county and do a good job. An internal investigation is under way, and we've agreed to pay for all repairs to the Perry's house." *(Washington Post, 14/3/00. Spotter: Kenneth Skilling)*

— o —

o *"THANK YOU ST. ANTHONY. Thank you, Saint Anthony, for your help in my distress. Hopefully my itch will not return. My sincere thanks, also, for blessing me with Mary, a wonderful and understanding wife. Mr. J. Archer, London, England."* (Messenger of Saint Anthony [Padua, International Edition], February 2000. Spotter: Father Cadman)

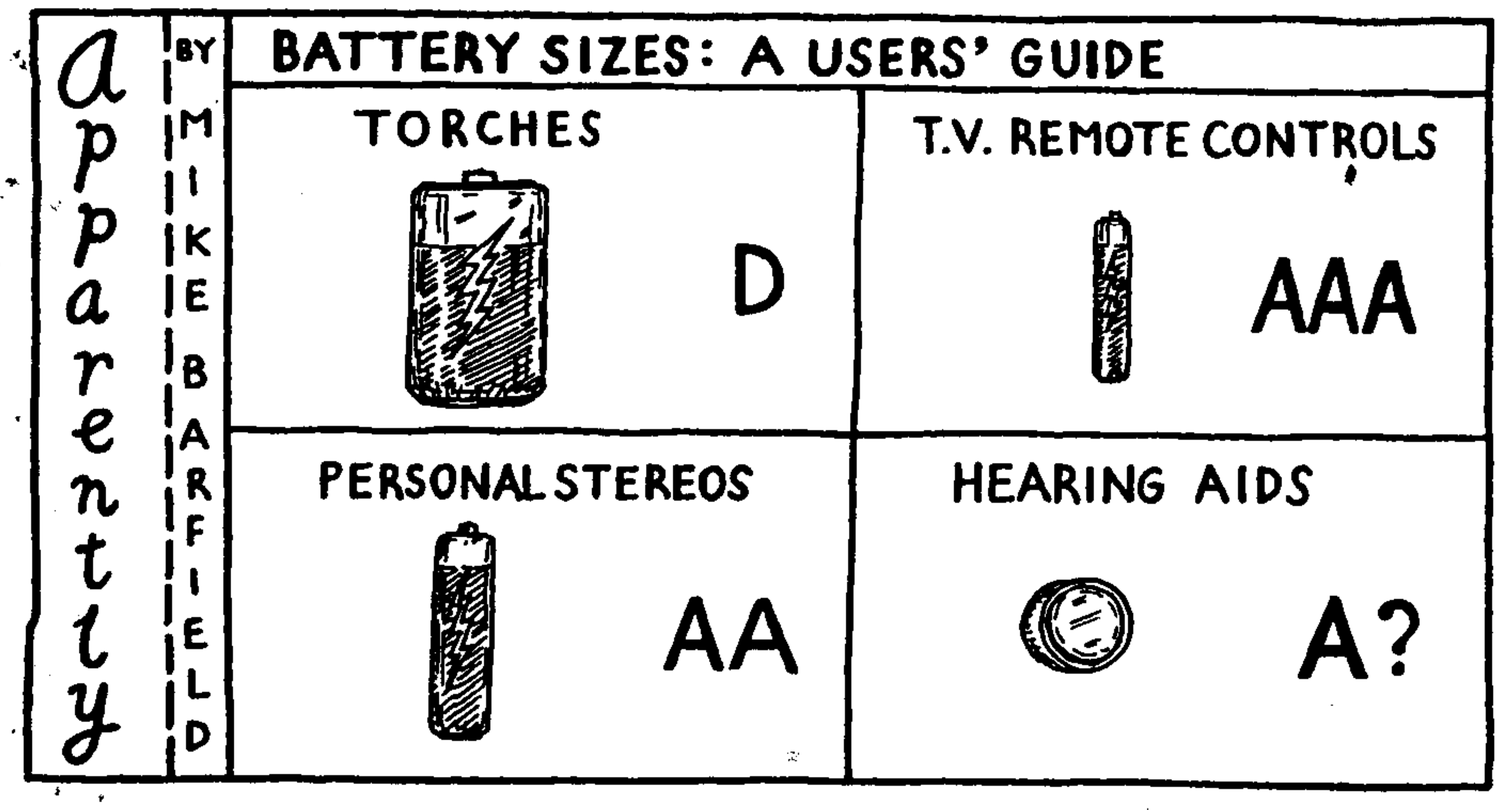
— o —

o "It is time to bring this subject out into the open," Dr Agnes Runganga told a medical conference in Harare. "Dry sex is one of the least talked about topics in Zimbabwe and Zambia. The whole essence of sexual pleasure in our culture is friction, and these herbal agents for dry sex are really designed for men's arousal, not women's pleasure".

"Several academic studies in Zimbabwe

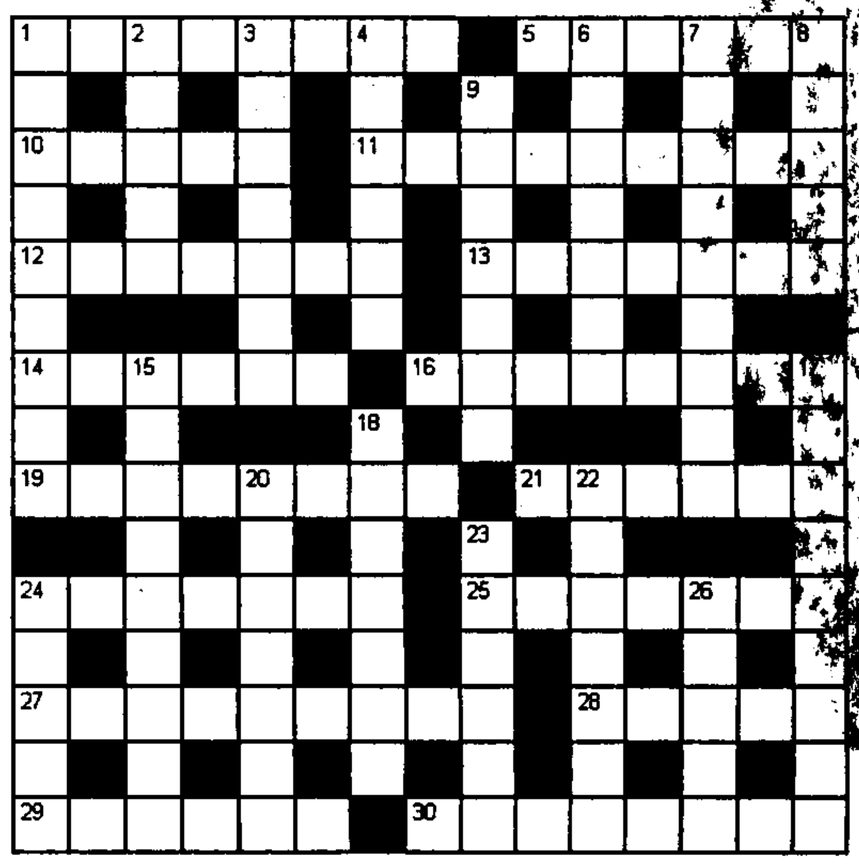
have reported that 9 out of 10 men find vaginal secretions unpleasant. Even KY Jelly lubrication is unacceptable to them. Men find it easy to demand dry sex from their girlfriends and sex workers, but not from their wives. Some men prefer sex with girlfriends and sex workers because they know how to be dry. Surveys show that women in all walks of life, married and unmarried, secretly use herbal vaginal drying agents. How to offer dry sex is part of a woman's mystery, and men are not supposed to know.

"In Zimbabwe, half of the women attending health clinics have confessed to putting herbs in the vagina regularly before having sex. In Kinshasa, 77% of the sex workers regularly smear products in the vagina to tighten it. But constant douching, wiping, and inserting herbs alters the vaginal flora and disrupts the cervical mucous membranes. Our advertising slogan 'Get Get Get Sopping Wet' may well cause offense, but the long-term consequences of dry sex for women's health are not good. Dry sex may be exciting for men, yes. But for women, it is harmful, even deadly." *(The Mirror [Malawi], 26/2/00. Spotter "Hawkeye")*



EYE CROSSWORD 154

by Cyclops — *£100 prize*



ACROSS

1/16 Don't despair – see what Viagra can do for you (4,4,6,2)
5 City has Prince William going topless (6)
10 Riff-raff copper gobbles queen (5)
11 Healthy prick – it's a good length for broadcasting purposes (5,4)
12 Not a problem of a red-blooded bloke, one repeatedly having way with Woody's ex. (7)
13 Cologne's good after piss pot (4,3)
14 Objectionable types, members (6)
16 (see 1 ac.)
19 Abused dole, given employment, then subjected to nit-picking (8)
21 Order your vulgar silk (6)
24 Woke up sporting an erection? (7)
25 A limit arbitrarily restricting one's force (7)
27 Highly-mobile Royal Marines have rules about love (9)
28 Little weight given to spin-doctors' third way by Mowlam – just a gimmick (5)
29 The Web's lacking aspiration and principles (6)
30 The same gooley-crushing dogma (8)

DOWN

1 Slept around and, sadly, took someone by force (9)
2 Forced evacuation has bearing on name change (5)
3 Broadcast may ask about hospital public cover-up (7)
4 Get a politician off his high horse and out of Westminster? (6)
6 Ruby gets snog from unsophisticated reactionary (7)
7 Showing shock signs of decline – turning into a John Major? (5,4)
8 Being before court is hard (5)
9 Arse blue on Brenda but hardly a dynamic speaker (7)
15 Queen reluctant to come out on this racy British dependency? (4,2,3)
17 Getting nothing out of group therapy, a politician in a punishing situation (9)
18 "Comedian Livingstone has date with queer!" (3,4)
20 Pro's after raise (second) – Johnny-come-lately! (7)
22 Would-be president, member out for topless fast piece (7)
23 Victoria wasn't an inspiration dead (6)
24 Where racy women flaunt what they've got up top (5)
26 Votes Conservative, hiding source of subsistence (5)

£100 prize to first solution opened on 14.4.00. Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG.

Solution to Crossword No. 153

Winner: MRS CLARE MUNKS

ACROSS: 1/3/9 Look straight in the eye 3 (see 1 ac.) 10 Get laid 11 Passion 12 Leeds 13 Elizabeth 14 Copulate 15 Topple 18 Motive 20 Old flame 23 Beer belly 25 Title 27 Currant 28 Austria 29 (see 1dn.) 30 Odes.

DOWN: 1/29 Legal loophole 2 On the spot 4 Ted Heath 5 Au pair 6 Gestapo 7 Tripe 8 Vassal 9 (see 1ac.) 14 Come back 16 Plastered 17 Play ball 19 Vibrato 21 Fetish 22 Clutch 24 Enrol 26 Exams.

JAY PEERAGE STINKS says Ashcroft

by Our House of Lords Staff **Lord Conrad Black Rod**

IN A stinging attack on the leader of the House of Lords, Lord Ashcroft of Selize described Baroness Jay's peerage as "a scandal that stinks to high heaven".

"This woman," he said, "has only been given a title because her father was the Prime Minister and she sucked up to Tony Blair. I had to pay good money for my peerage and this woman has got one for free.

"It is an outrage," he continued. "What sort of democracy is this? Surely anyone with enough money should be entitled to buy their way into the upper chamber?"

In another unpleasant outburst Sir Edward Heath in turn attacked Lord Ashcroft.

"This man has made a fortune from a dodgy third world country," said Sir Edward, 96, "whereas I have received huge cheques from the Chinese, particularly their delightful premier Mo Dem Down, who was unjustly accused of massacring..." *(cont. p.94)*

POLICE WANT 'CRIME TO BE LEGALISED'

by Our Drugs Staff **Lynda Lee-Potsmoker**

A SPOKESMAN for the Police Federation last night argued that it was time to legalise crime in Britain. Said Inspector "Crackhead of the Yard" Cracker, "Let's be honest. Trying to catch criminals is wasting a lot of police time which could be better spent harassing motorists."

He continued, "Legalising crime would be a logical solution to the problem. If we simply de-criminalised crime then no one would be breaking the law and we would have reversed the rising crime rate at a stroke.

"A lot of young people," he concluded, "are attracted to crime merely because it is illegal. If it was legal to break the law then obviously you would find no criminals on the street.

"Wow!" he added. "Have you got any more of that stuff?"

TV Highlights

Return of the popular quiz game "Who Wants To Be A Cronyblair?"

ITV 7.30pm

The show that has the nation gripped as each week host Tony Blair wins a million pounds by giving contestants the chance to become a Life Peer.

The format is simple: Tony Blair asks them one question which they have to get right — "Will you give me a million pounds?"

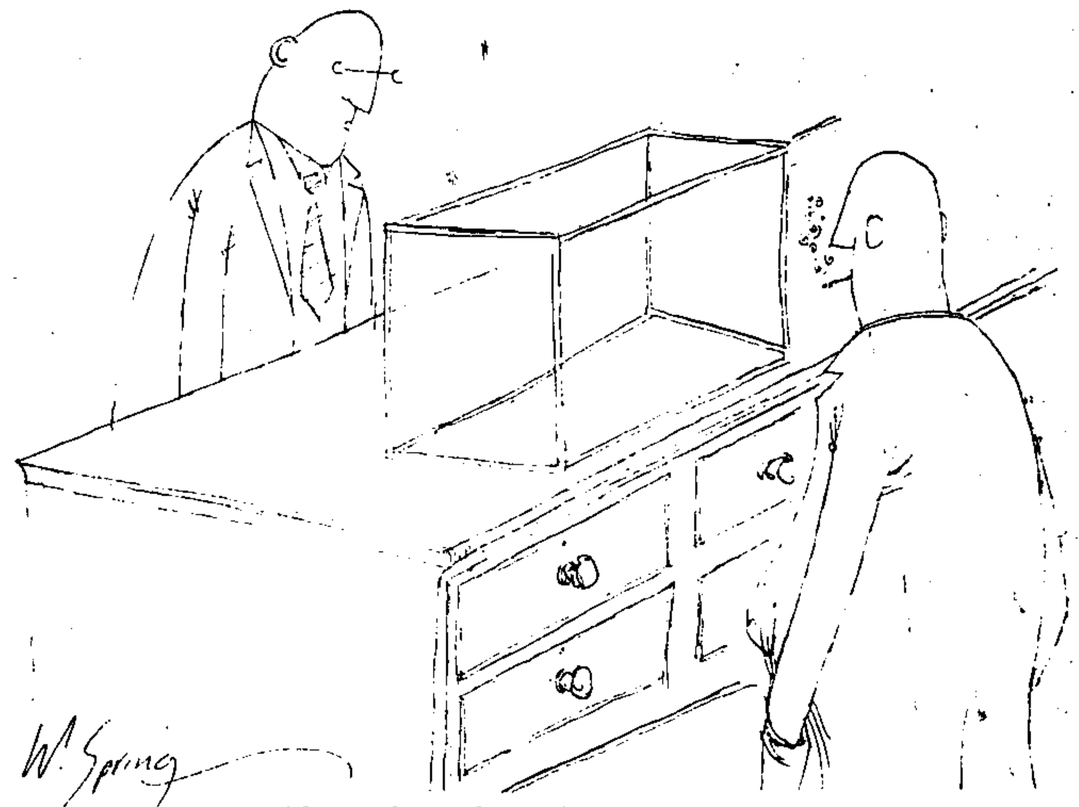
A) YES.
B) YES.
C) YES.
D) NO, I'll give you two million.

Da Ali C Show

Channel 4 11.30

Foul-mouthed comic creation Ali C (performed by the brilliant Alastair Campbell) conducts spoof interviews with gullible journalists in which he tells them how marvellous the government is.

See the hacks fall for his ridiculous impersonation of a government spokesman! Only Tony Benn notices that Ali C with his catchphrase "Vote Labour, innit?" is a complete fraud and challenges him to defend his ridiculous and offensive views.



"About this 'chameleon' you sold me..."

PRAVDARIEL

BIRTISM SWEPT AWAY AS DYKOV UNVEILS FIVE YEAR PLAN

by Our BBC Staff **Raymond Snodoff**

THERE were scenes of jubilation in the streets of White City (formerly Birtograd) as delighted workers began pulling down statues of the hated dictator John Birt and smashing the symbols of his Birtist regime.

Already thousands of apparatchiks appointed by Birt have been removed from office by the new leader whose five year plan has been interpreted as an attempt to repair the damage done by Birt's "non-cultural revolution".

Red Square Eyes

Birt has been airbrushed from all official BBC pictures and declared a non-person.

Schoolchildren will be taught that the Director Generalship of the BBC was passed directly from Michael Checklandov, the architect of the accountancy revolution, to the much-loved Greg Dykov or "Roland Ratski" as he is affectionately known by his comrades.

Announcing his plans to a cheering meeting of loyalists (Alan Yentoff, Mark Thomsonovitch and Jenny Abramski), the leader looked forward to a new golden era.

"Comrades," he said, "my five year programme is simple. It will be a repeat of all our current programmes for the next five years."

● *There will be another chance to see Comrade Dykov's speech at 3.00am on BBC Choice.*

Stop Press

John Birt is believed to be in an asylum for the insane somewhere in Westminster under the assumed name of Baron Birt.

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

Well, there's certainly only one thing I can write about this week, judging from my postbag!

I cannot remember any moral issue causing such heated debate in the parish as the one which is now occupying all our thoughts, as we look forward to a certain happy event in May! *Should your vicar take time off to be with Cherie and their new baby Tony (or Tonella)!?*

On the one hand, there are those of you who say that a vicar's first duty is to his flock, and that he should carry on with all his duties running the parish. Particularly when none of his colleagues is up to the task of standing in for him (no offence John, Gordon, David, Jack, Stephen, Mo, etc).

On the other hand, there are those of you (including Cherie) who say "Look, this is the 21st century. Isn't it the first duty of any man to be at the side of his wife or partner, at such an important moment – the beginning of a new life!"

Isn't this what they call a Catch 28 situation? Heads I lose, tails you win!

Whatever I do, I am going to be criticised. On the one hand, our friend in Tesco will be standing by the nappy counter, telling me that I should be getting back to the work I am paid to do.

On the other hand, some aggressive working women with high-flying careers in such fields as the Law may well be shouting at me in the middle of the night to go and make a cup of tea for the nanny!

And who is to say which of these options is the best one?

But I think there is a third way, as there so often is in life! And the third way in this case is simple. I won't make a decision either way until the last minute, until I see what most people in the parish think.

To make your views known to me, Mr Campbell has printed a special slip at the bottom of this letter for you all to fill in. Please send it in to the vicarage as soon as possible, and remember it is a SECRET ballot (ie, Cherie will not see it).

Yours in hope!

Tony

SHOULD TONY TAKE PATERNITY LEAVE?

I THINK

☐ A. The Vicar should concentrate on his important duties running the parish as only he knows how.

☐ B. The Vicar should waste his time hanging around at home, getting in everyone's way, when he should be back in his office running the parish.

To Remember In Your Prayers

● Poor Sarah Macaulay, whom I understand has been very badly let down by her boyfriend.

After leading her on for many years with promises of marriage, and even being photographed together with children for the benefit of the local paper, she has now been "dumped down", as I believe the expression is. Let us pray that Sarah does not fall for the temptation of forgiveness, but makes it known in the strongest possible way how she feels about mean, dour, workaholic Scotsmen who cannot commit themselves to anything! T.B.

Lenten Talk

What it Means to be a St Albion-ite

In this, the third of his Lenten addresses, the Vicar will consider those qualities which make the people of this parish of ours so uniquely St Albionish:

- tolerance
- hard work
- respect for leaders
- obedience to authority
- disinclination to argue with those in charge.

Attendance at this talk in the Church Hall is of course voluntary, but Mr Campbell will be taking names at the door.
You have been warned! A.C.

The Vicar drops in on one of the House Focus Groups (Thanks, Mrs Harris!) with his message for Lent: "Trust me or you'll end up in the wilderness for 40 years" *(Book of Worzel, 17.5)*

The St Albion's Home for Distressed Gentlefolk

The Matron, Mrs Jay, writes:

I am sick of listening to people complaining about our admissions policy. It is not true that to gain entry to the Home you have to be either very rich or a friend of the Vicar's. We have made it quite clear that you have to be both. I hope that clears the matter up once and for all.

Mrs Jay (née Callaghan),
Matron, The People's Home,
St Albion's.

Parish Postbag

Dear Vicar,

In all my long years as a loyal supporter of St Albion's I never imagined a day when I would find myself accusing the Vicar of destroying the integrity of our faith. Yet, only yesterday he gave a hundred places in the Old Folks Home to his personal

Yours faithfully,
Tony Benn,
Tetley House, PG TIPS.

The Editor reserves the right to cut letters in the interests of the Vicar.

The Tent In Lent

Thanks to our good friend Mr Gerbil for coming up with a brilliant suggestion as to how we can all celebrate Easter.

He is confidently expecting record crowds over the holiday, which is why he is making a special Family Ticket Offer – Buy One, Get Twenty Free!

Verses By A Local Poet

Reasons To Be Cheerful

(with apologies to the late Ian Dury)

1. Tony
2. Tony
3. Tony
4. The Vicar
5. Rev. A. Blair
6. Cherie's Husband
7. Father of Baby Tony (or Tonella)

A. Motion, St Albion's Parish Poet

'BLOODY PAYDAY' INQUIRY BEGINS

by Our Nothern Ireland Staff **London Derry Irvine**

THERE WERE shock scenes in Derry yesterday as a vast army of lawyers marched through the streets to the town hall demanding their right to receive fees for two years' work on an inquiry.

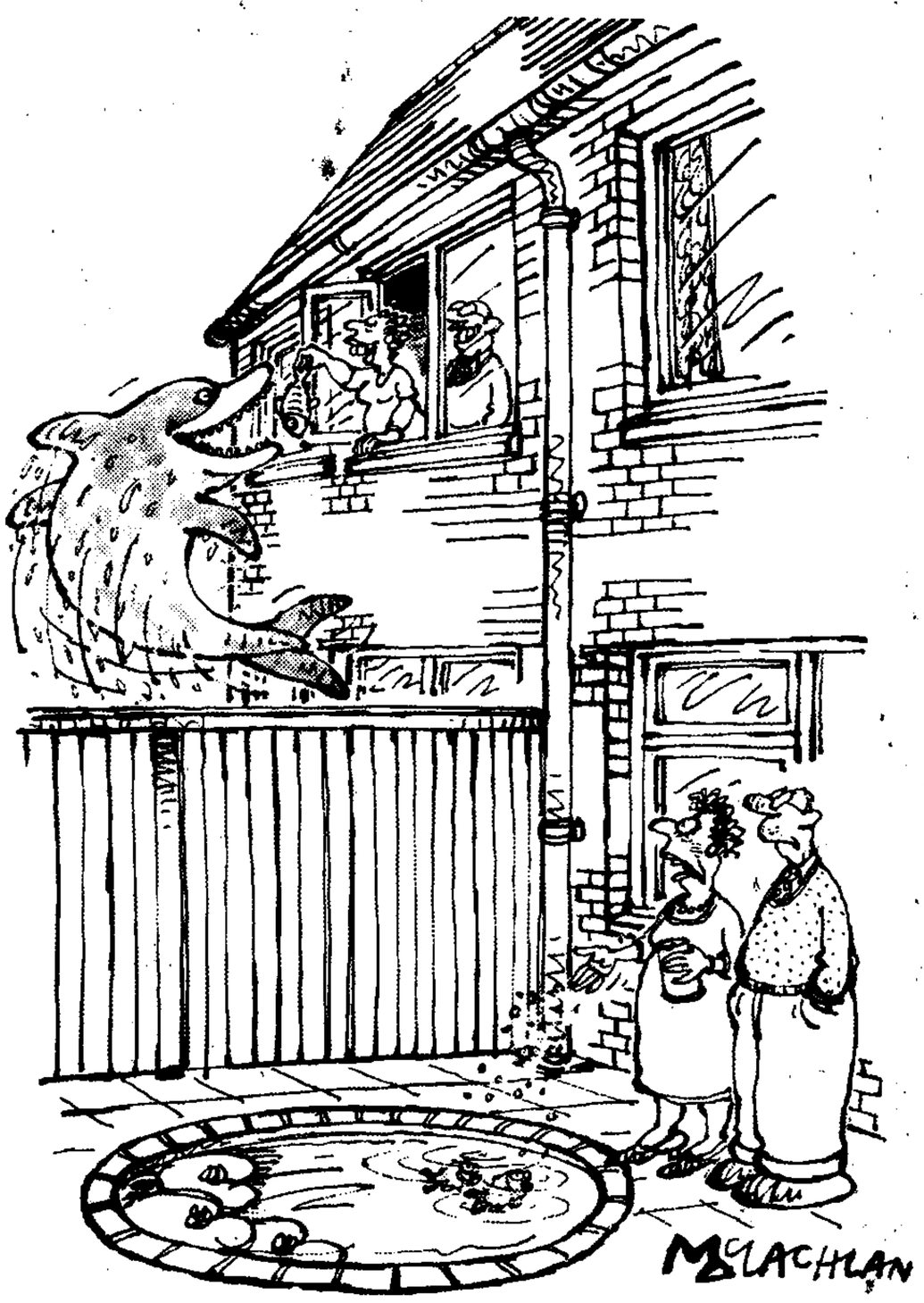
Said the leader of Lawyers For Money (LFM), Sir Charles Hugefee QC: "For too long we lawyers have not been given any money for the shocking events of 1972. It is time that we had redress for this appalling abuse of our rights."

The lawyers then barricaded the town hall, erecting a huge wall of laptop computers, bundles of affidavits and irrelevant documents costing a lot of money, as they chanted *We Shall Overcharge*, their favourite protest song.

BLOODY SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

"We don't care how long it takes," said Mr Michael Cashcard QC, "nor do we care what the findings of the inquiry will be. The important thing is that, at the end of the day, we unearth a vast pile of public money in our bank accounts."

The cost of the inquiry is estimated at £2 billion.



"Bloody Joneses! Just because we've put in a new fishpond..."

EVIDENCE SHOWS ARMY 'PLANNED' MASSACRE

by Our Enquiry Staff
Lunchtime O'Bogside

AHITHERTO top-secret memo written to Prime Minister Edward Heath in 1972 by General Carveup (now Field Marshal Lord Carveup of Derry) proves that the British soldiers had explicit instructions to commit a massacre on the day of the Civil Rights march which led to Bloody Sunday.

These are the General's shock words:

TOP SECRET

Dear Prime Minister,

You're right. These people are getting out of hand. As I see it, we have three options:

1. We do nothing.
2. We do something.
3. We think of something else to do.

Do let me know which of these courses of action you most favour.

Yours faithfully,
M. CARVEUP,
G.O. Com.

It is now clear what these chillingly noncommittal words were to lead to, only 79 days later, when *(cont. p. 94)*

Exclusive extracts from the greatest spy thriller of all time

TINKER TAILOR SOLDIER DRUNK

by John Le Carriedout

"WAKE UP, Mr Smiley," said the barman, in the semi-darkness of the Espionadas Tapas 'n' Sangria Bar. "It's time you went home."

"Shmiley?" said the owl-like Head of British Intelligence. "Who'sh he? I dunno who you mean. I'm not a shpy. I don't even work for the Shecret Shervice."

"Shall I get you a taxi, sir?" asked Carlos kindly as he cleared the table of its 17 bottles of Russian Vodka.

"How dare you?" snapped the unflappable *eminence gris* of British espionage. "Do you know who I am?"

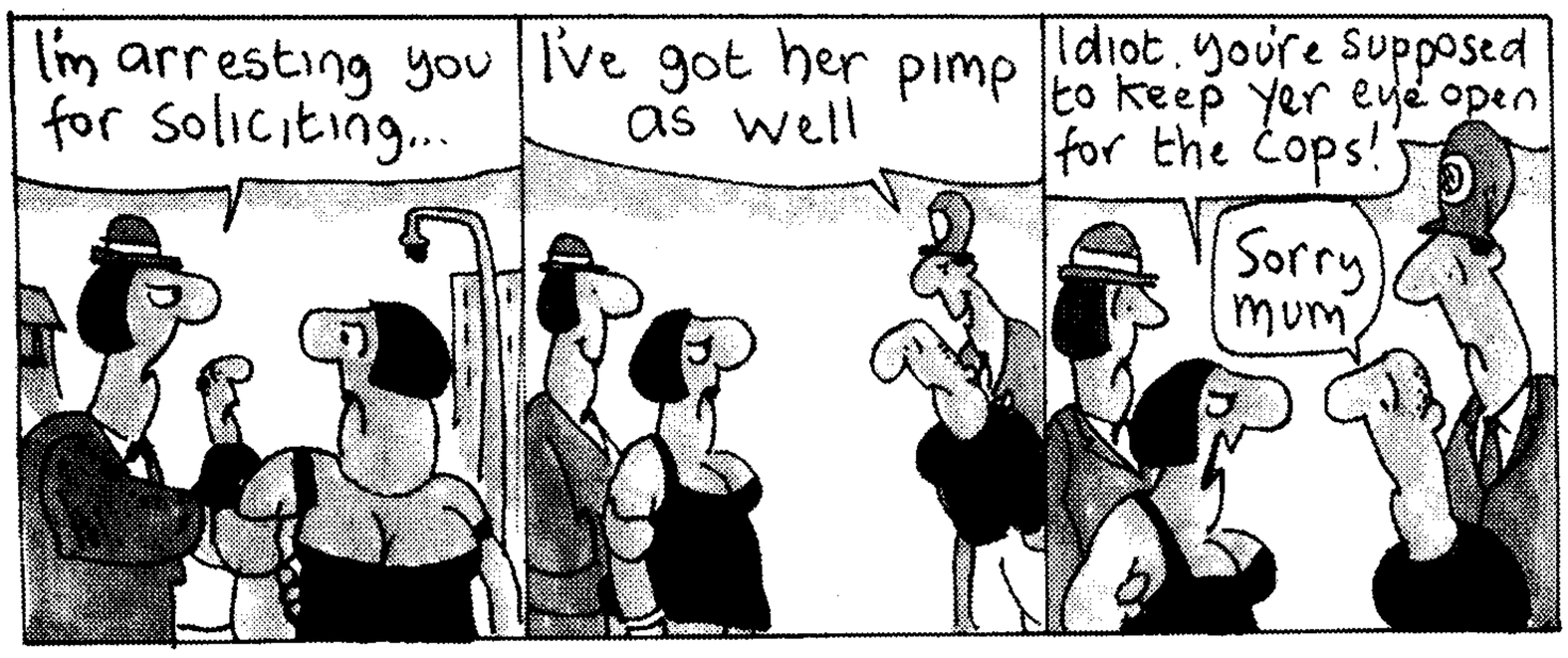
The barman nodded his head sadly. "Good. Because I don't. It's shafer that way..."

The donnish bespectacled figure put on his hat and crawled across the floor to the door.

"Don't forget your laptop, Mr Smiley," said the moustachioed Spaniard. But it was too late. Smiley had vanished into the night to be sick in the gutter outside.

NEXT WEEK: Tinker, Shayler, Spy, Columnist for Punch.

HUSBAND



School News

St Cakes

European Human Rights Term begins today. There are 397 males in the school. H.B.R. Condom-Dispenser (Cottages) is Head Gay. T.B.R. Alternative-Lifestyle (Prides) is Captain of the Pinks. Mr H.O.M. O'Sexuale (O.C.) replaces Mr H.O.M. O'Phobe (O.C.) as Head of Moral Studies. The School Chapel will be rededicated by Bishop Livein-Partner (O.C.) as a Centre for Sexual Healing. [Mr Klaus Twenty-Eight, the German philosophy teacher, has taken early retirement. His position will not be filled.] There will be a performance of Channel Four's "Queer As Folk" adapted for the stage by Sir Graham Norton O.C. in the Outrage Room (formerly School Hall), Tatchell's will be held on June 3rd (weather permitting).

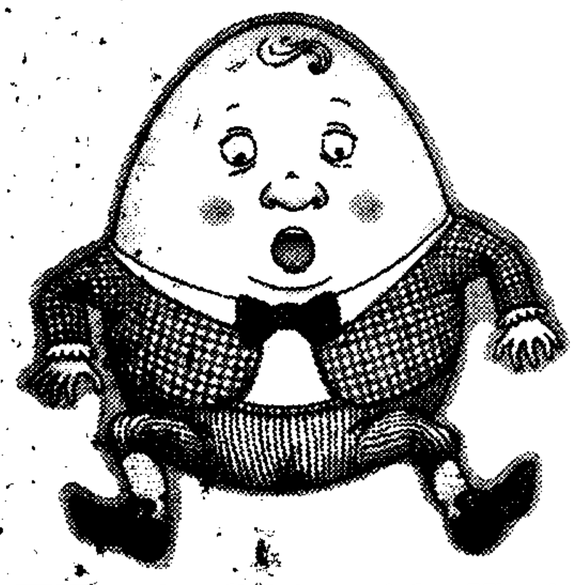
This announcement accords with EC Directive 69/69/69B.

Nursery Times

FRIDAY APRIL 7 2000

All King's Horses And Men Held In Drugs Bust

by Our Nursery Crime Staff **'Snow' White**



THE entire division of the King's Horses and Men have been arrested in a dawn swoop after they had claimed that they had seen "a giant egg fall off a wall".

Police became suspicious when the men returned to barracks with stories about their attempts to resuscitate the so-called egg in what they called Operation Humpty-Dumpty.

Said a spokesman for the police, "They were clearly on some mind-altering substance, probably a class 'A' drug, which led them to hallucinate and imagine that they had super-human powers, such as piecing together the shell of a broken egg-person."

Late News

Grand Old Duke of York's Regiment in New Shame

TEN thousand men are being charged with narcotics offences after their "trip" to a hill neighbouring their barracks.

"The men were found wandering aimlessly up and down the hill," said police. "When they were up, they were really, really up and when they were down, they were really, really down, which is a classic symptom of substance abuse."

DANDO KILLER— NEW POLICE LEAD

by Our Crime Staff **Scott Free**

INSPECTOR "Knacker of the Yard" Knacker revealed at a press conference today that the police have made "a major breakthrough" in the hunt for the killer of the much-loved television presenter Jill Dando.

"We have employed the services of one of the world's leading experts in psychological profiling," said the inspector, "and he has now come up with an exact profile of the killer. It cannot now be long before we make an arrest.

"He is a man, or woman, of murderous tendencies, with the unique ability to remain undetected and evade arrest for an unlimited period of time." *(Reuters)*

STOP PRESS

So many policemen have been suspended on suspicion of corruption that, according to a Scotland Yard spokesman, "We no longer have sufficient officers to arrest them." *(A.P.)*

COURT CIRCULAR

BILLABONGA, NEW QUEENSLAND

Wednesday: Her Majesty the Queen will today attend the official opening of the Billabonga Town Sheep Dip. She will be presented to Bruce Blimey, the Mayor of Billabonga, who will pinch her bottom and throw a tomato at her husband, His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh. She will later participate in a walkabout along the Digger's Bum Promenade where she will wave politely at various girls called Kylie who will be shouting "We love you, Lizzie and give that Wills a snog from us!".

KENSINGTON PALACE

His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales will not be taking luncheon today due to his decision to forgo the midday meal for the duration of the forty days and nights of the Lenten period.

That Prince of Wales Lenten Lunch

What he will not be eating

Charles Windsor Soup

Humble Pie with Lent-ils

Organic Toad-in-the-Holy

Queen-Going-On-For-At-Least-Another-30-Years of Puddings

Camilla Parker-Bowl of Fruit

Nuts

ROY of the BARBERS
IT'S NEARLY THE END OF THE SEASON AND ROY IS HAVING A POOR RUN OF FORM...
I'M USELESS! IT'S BEEN TWO WHOLE DAYS SINCE MY PICTURE WAS IN THE PAPERS!
KEEP YOUR HAIR ON ROY!
MM... THAT GIVES ME AN IDEA
ANYTHING FOR THE WEEKEND SIR?
COME ON YOU RED TOPS!
GREAT HEADLINE ROY!
YES — THE FRONT PAGE PLEASE!
COOPER

THE Sun

Friday, April 7, 2000 30p THE PEOPLES PAPER

INSIDE: HOW WATCHING BBC PROGRAMMES GIVES YOU CANCER...

HURRAH!

IT'S NATIONAL TITS DAY!

by Our Cleavage Staff
PHILLIPA PAGE-THREE

YES, FOLKS! Today's the day when we celebrate the country's biggest tits. And here they are:

DAVE

GARRY

DOMINIC

RICHARD

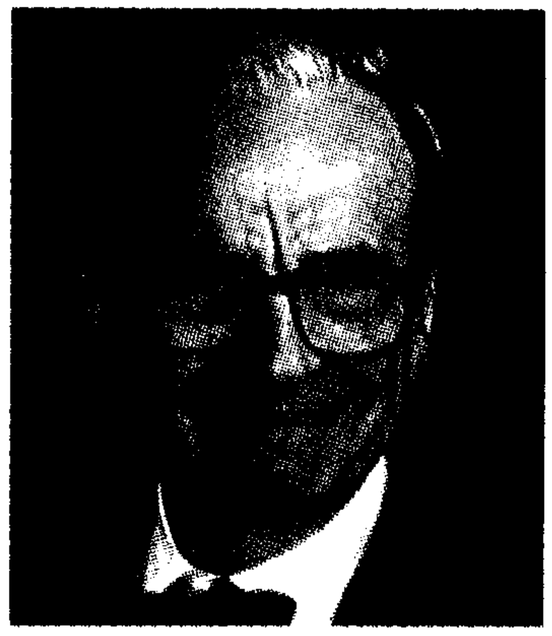
Blimey, what a lovely pair! And they've both got measurements of 36 up top!!! That's IQ, folks!!! Dave and Gary may have their knockers (!!) but we reckon you won't see a finer couple of prize melons anywhere in Britain!

And there's more fun to come because the Sun has declared tomorrow National Arse Day – and just look at the arses we've lined up:

Yes, these Sun-sational bums are the ones that make the paper the *Bottom* of the barrel!!

And, in case you think we've gone too far, watch out for next week's amusing non-sexist idea:

It's National Prick Day featuring guess who?



THE SUN SAYS

How low can you get?!

WHEN Times Editor Peter Stothard is ill with cancer all the other so-called newspapers can do is print lies about him being sacked.

They should be ashamed of themselves and hang their heads in shame at their shameful shame.

The Guardian, the Independent, the Telegraph, the Mail and the Evening Standard have published GARBAGE, RUBBISHY RUBBISH AND RUBBISHY GARBAGE about an innocent man.

That is the Sun's job. If anyone is going to make up stories, fabricate quotes and dress up malicious rumour as fact it is the Sun!

What will the so-called quality press do next? Print a completely made-up interview with the widow of a dead Falklands hero? Come off it! Let's face facts. All the other newspaper editors are stinking hypocrites and this latest disgusting display proves that I should be sacked *(Surely "they"? Ed.)*

© D. Yelland, The Pot and Kettle, Wapping.

THE BRITS HAVE ARRIVED!!!

by Our Oscar Staff **Beverley Hills**

YES. The whole of Hollywood was last night toasting the amazing success of "the Brits" – as British talent swept the board at this year's Oscar ceremony.

With tears in his eyes, Phillipe Kalatowsky of Woking stepped up to receive the coveted award for Best Location Caterer for his work on the teenage cult horror classic Death Terminator 7.

And this was only one of the over three awards scooped by the overwhelming new wave of British cinematic know-how.

Also honoured was Carlita von Duisenberg, 22, who now lives in Neasden, for her work on Mike Leigh's period classic Gilbert and George.

SHLOCK

As she picked up the Best Supporting Hairstylist award, Miss Duisenberg burst into tears and had to be helped off-stage by Dame Judi Dench.

But the greatest triumph of all was that of British director Sam Mendes, who overcame the obvious difficulties of being saddled with an American script, cast, cinematographer and buckets of American studio money and yet still created a truly British masterpiece about a dysfunctional American family living in suburban America called "British Beauty".

Make no mistake. It was Britain's night to remember at the first Oscar ceremony of the new Millennium. The Americans' paltry total of 738 Oscars tells the real story of the night the Brits finally arrived and were told they couldn't come in because they hadn't got tickets.

MORE BRITISH TRIUMPHS

● Kevin Spacey likes London **p. 2**
● Angelina Jolie wears British watch to ceremony **p. 4**
PLUS ● Those Naughty Oscar Dresses In Full by Telegraph Fashion Correspondent Charles Phwoar **pages 2-86**.

The Daily Telegraph

The Advantages of Legalisation

IT is now time to think the unthinkable and admit for the first time that attempts to control the sale of the Daily Telegraph have been an abject failure. It is freely available on most high streets, railway stations and supermarkets and it is estimated that over a million people "take" the Daily Telegraph regardless of the damage it can do to their health.

And let us not underestimate the side effects. Medical research has proved that regular consumption of the Telegraph leads to degeneration of the mental faculties. Readers become alternatively depressed and disgusted, particularly if they live in Tunbridge Wells. Some imagine that they see the first cuckoo of spring in March and others become paranoid, suffering from the delusion that millions of asylum-seekers are swarming into their bedrooms and stealing their womenfolk.

But there are positives. People who are old or incurably insane can benefit from "doing" the crossword on a regular basis.

Surely Jack Straw must be bold enough to recognise that the Daily Telegraph is a fact of life whether we like it or not.

Keeping it underground only helps the fortunes of peddlars, dealers and unsavoury barons from Canada.

Should we not decriminalise the Daily Telegraph now? Let us know what you think by ringing our new Dopeline or e-mailing us at www.pot.com

© *Charles Moorijuana, The Old Spliffery, Cannabis Square.*

Shock News in Brief

Middle-aged English women keep their clothes on **2**
John Thaw not in ITV drama **3**
Exclusive: no interview with Ali G **4**
Interesting article in Spectator **94**

TURDS REUNITE TO MAKE MONEY

by Our Pop Music Staff **Hunter Roundforastory**

THE THREE remaining members of the popular '60s singing group The Turds were briefly reunited today to write an enormous cheque to themselves. *(Surely "an autobiography"? Ed.)*

In what was described as the greatest event in the history of music, the Turds gave a press conference to over 5,000 screaming journalists.

"A lot of rubbish has been written about us by other people," said Sir Spiggy McTurdney. "Now we are going to write it ourselves.

"I and the other survivors from the days of Turdmania want to put the record straight by blaming the dead Turd who isn't here and can't answer back.

"This book will be bigger than the Bible," said another man with a beard — believed to be Bingo Turd, the former drummer, or possibly George Turdison, or Shri Oranjeboom Swami as he now prefers to be known.

"This book will contain lots of sensational anecdotes, like the time we couldn't remember what happened between 1961 and 1999."

The book is to coincide with the release of huge sums of money into the Turds' accounts. *(Surely "Anthology Of Greatest Hits including 'All You Need Is Money'?" Ed.)*

The Last Giant Of Letters Is Dead

by A.N. Wislon

PROUST. Shakespeare. Powell. The unbroken line of English literary genius has been broken at last by the tragic and untimely death at the age of 94 of A.N. Powell, with his unforgettable 28-volume roman à fleuve *Come Dancing*.

Who can forget his galaxy of such unforgettable characters as... er... the Tarkington-Barkingtons, Lavinia Starborgling, the enigmatic J.R. Hartley, and my own particular favourite, Lady Ann Widdecombe.

We all of us, I think, have a Widdepool in our lives. And it is the character of Winderpool which will live for ever, alongside such giants of literature as Falstaff, Mr Pickwick and Jonathan Aitken. (*Not cont'd age 94)*

Daily Mail, Friday, April 7, 2000

Good Riddance To An Evil Monster

by **Dr Theodore Dullpimple** of The Spectator

Disgusting

I SAY this. When the history of the 20th Century comes to be written, the evils of Stalin and Hitler will pale into insignificance compared with the moral chaos unleashed by a small man with a pipe sitting in Cambridge.

His name – Dr Alex Comfort, author of the notorious Joy Of Sex manual which did more damage to Western civilisation than Mein Kampf and Mao's Little Red Book put together.

The permissive society, unleashed by Comfort's evil notion that sex is somehow enjoyable, has brought a tidal wave of misery, and human suffering, in terms of broken homes, abortions, teenage pregnancies, child abuse and articles by Polly Toynbee in the Guardian.

Keep On Going, This Is Better Than Paul Johnson

Make no mistake. The world is well rid of this seedy little doctor with his boring articles in the Spectator about how ghastly the working classes are, particularly when they take their trousers off.

© *Dr A. Daniels, Mailtrash Productions, in association with the Spectacularlyboring.*

Nationwide — Division 1

TOMORROW

Blackburn .....0 Crewe 1

16,057 Cramb 80

Daily Telegraph

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Anthony Powell, novelist

So. Farewell then
Anthony Powell,
Author of
A Dance To The Music Of Time.

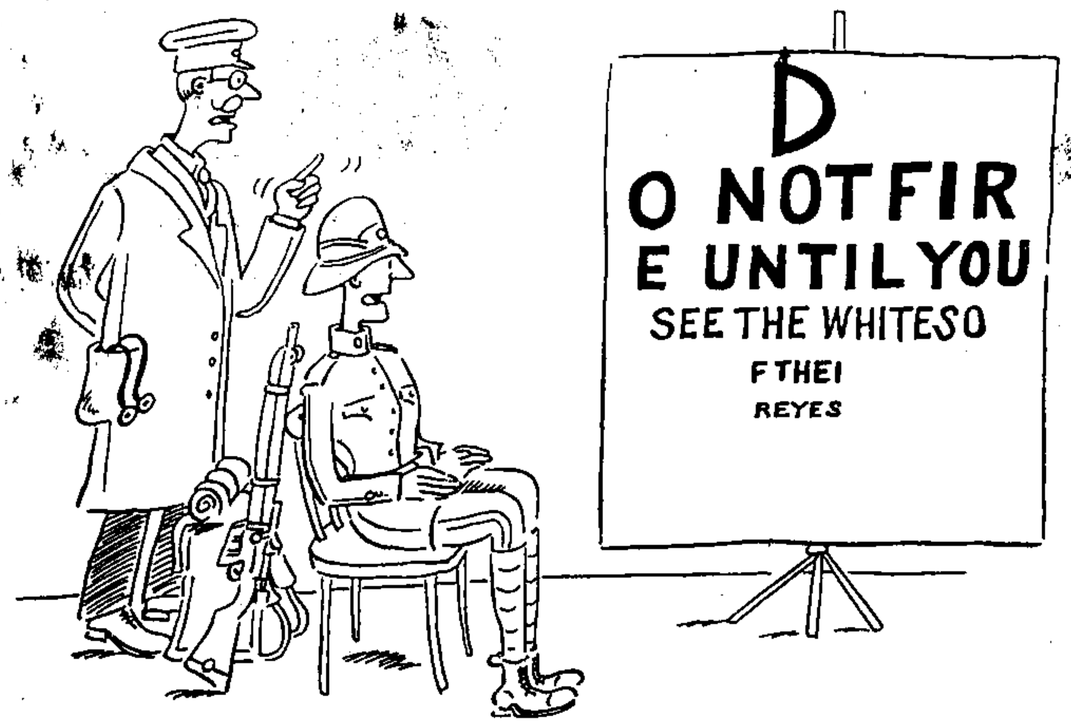
I regret to say that
I have not read it.
Nor has my friend Keith.
But his mum saw

One episode on the
Television

And said that it was a bit
Boring.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

Victorian Military Eye Test



The Editor Of The Sunday Telegraph Dominic Lawson Gives An Exclusive Interview To The Daily Telegraph

by Our Media Staff **Terry Graph**

THERE is no more prestigious prize in world journalism than the Tobacconist And Retailers Gazette Newspaper Of The Year Award.

So no wonder that this year it was the turn of the Sunday Telegraph to win it.

I had the privilege of interviewing the paper's much-loved editor Dominic Lawson, who graciously gave me five minutes of his time while he was working out how to put the words "Newspaper of the Millennium" all over the front page.

"Some people say, Sir Dominic, that you are a little aggressive on occasions. Is that true?"

"Who said that?" he snarled in reply. "Their days are numbered, whoever they are. I'll track them down. Just you see if I don't! Now get out, you bastard!"

I left him to his difficult job which he performs with such astonishing skill.

© *InterTelegraph Promotions.*

Have You Found Salvation?

asks L. Ron Aitken, Chief Minister of the Church of Lientology

SINNERS! You too can experience the joys of repentance and forgiveness through the wise words of L. Ronathan Aitken:

"Brothers and sisters! I confess before Almighty God that I too once did wrong – but not really. And I was made to pay the price.

Now I am asking you to pay the price too. Only £99.99, from the Daily Telegraph Book Club. *(Surely "Crook Blub"? Ed.)* Send now for your copy of my personal testament 'I Am The Way, The Truth and The Lie' by L. Ron Aitken."

Some testimony from fellow Lientologists

N. Hamilton writes: *"Like L. Ron I was innocent and the media crucified me. But since I discovered L. Ron's path to money and being on television, I am once again happy."*

J. Archer writes: *"Like L. Ron I did nothing wrong and the media ruined my life. All I did was tell a few lies. But now thanks to the Church of Lientology, I realise I was telling the truth all along."*

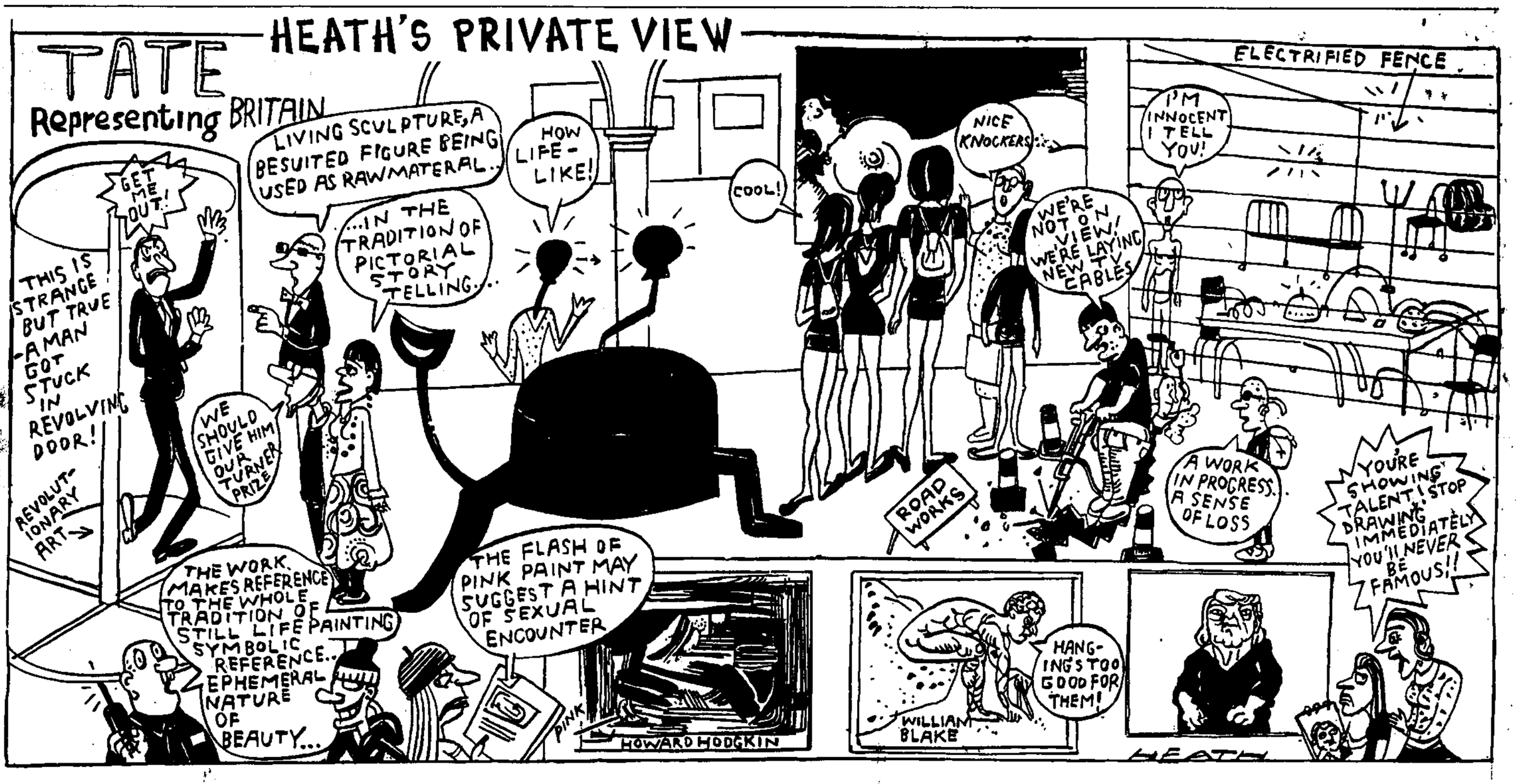
Now, you too can walk with your head held high, thanks to the greatest religous teacher since the Rev. Sun K. Moon.

Film publicist Robert Levine said Weobley would be known as Lark for the film – a fictitious town set in the heart of Wales. "We wanted to find a village that was typically English," he said.

Shropshire Star

6.30 Opera on 3: *The Battered Bride*. Nikolaus Lehnhoff's production of Smetana's comic opera recorded at Glyndebourne in August.

Daily Telegraph


HEATH'S PRIVATE VIEW
TATE
Representing BRITAIN
GET ME OUT!
THIS IS STRANGE BUT TRUE A MAN GOT STUCK IN REVOLVING DOOR!
REVOLUTIONARY ART →
LIVING SCULPTURE, A BESUITED FIGURE BEING USED AS RAWMATERAL..
...IN THE TRADITION OF PICTORIAL STORY TELLING..
WE SHOULD GIVE HIM OUR TURNER PRIZE
HOW LIFE-LIKE!
COOL!
THE WORK MAKES REFERENCE TO THE WHOLE TRADITION OF STILL LIFE PAINTING SYMBOLIC REFERENCE.. EPHEMERAL NATURE OF BEAUTY...
THE FLASH OF PINK PAINT MAY SUGGEST A HINT OF SEXUAL ENCOUNTER
PINK
HOWARD HODGKIN
NICE KNOCKERS
WE'RE NOT ON VIEW! WE'RE LAYING NEW TV CABLES
ROAD WORKS
WILLIAM BLAKE
HANG-ING'S TOO GOOD FOR THEM!
ELECTRIFIED FENCE
I'M INNOCENT I TELL YOU!
A WORK IN PROGRESS. A SENSE OF LOSS
YOU'RE SHOWING TALENT! STOP DRAWING IMMEDIATELY YOU'LL NEVER BE FAMOUS!!
HEATH

DIARY

THE LOST GOLFING JOURNALS OF SYLVIA PLATH

Saturday 3.45pm: Is this all there is? A ball and a club? A club and a ball? The ball, white, dirty, barely circular, fit for nothing but hitting hitting hitting. The club like the kind of club HE would use to knock the heads off baby chicks before crunching them with his great flat foot splat into the parched ground. Is this all there is? Well, is it?

I join my companions in the changing-room. How to describe them? Let my powers of observation take over, for I must note down all their characteristics, if any, for future use. So here goes: there are three of them, they are human beings on the brink and they are here to take their stab-stabbing stabs at golf, the bastard cruel Nazi sport that stalks the innocent like a centipede in bandages.

I put on my tartan trousers, blood-red and bile-green. I signal for a caddy. There is no caddy my caddy has gone I have no caddy. And he has taken my clubs.

Caddy, I have had to kill you
You took my irons away
Coffin heavy, a bag full of golf
Clubs with a five iron
Missing
And a single tee, red as a virgin's
Period.
Caddy, caddy, you bastard.

4.15pm: It turns out the caddy was waiting for me with my golf trolley round the front. How to find the words to describe him? He looks like a man. Young. A young man. He looks like a young man. Yes, I am a writer!

We walk to the first tee, my legs moving apart then coming together then moving apart again like a surgeon's blood-soaked pliers. I take a golf ball from the compartment. It is round, pitted with dimpled craters, dimpled craters like a leper's buttocks, and, like a leper's buttocks, meant for hitting. Why do we keep hitting lepers' buttocks? Through the rain, I imagine myself a leper, my golf-ball buttocks slammed and swiped by a million satanic golfers.

I am that leper.

And I feel rage.

4.30pm: Oh what a beautiful game this is, as lovely and ordered as a full rack of herbs in a well-scrubbed larder before dinner is served! I have taken a birdy on the first hole, and am now well ahead of the other women, whose complexions, incidentally, leave a lot to be desired. No man would be attracted to them!

Every querulous fiber of my body is satiated into a great glowing peace!

4.45pm: I splutter and gasp, now certain of my doom. Golf grips me by the throat and chokes me 'til I scream and scream and scream for mercy. I have done it again, one year in every two I do it. On the second tee, I use my driver. The ball soars high, high, high into the air before plummeting into the bunker, stubbornly circular and untwitching, like a dead hamster someone has chewed on.

"Bad luck!" shouts one of my companions. I shiver beneath her scorn. I want to wrap my driver round her female neck and strangle strangle strangle her to death, like she would club to death a baby seal, if only she could.

I stand knee-deep in the bunker, swinging, swinging. Sand grains scatter everywhere like another Hiroshima formed of so many bloodthirsty flying rabbits, the long white floppy ears of the sand waggling to and fro like torturing-irons. Sinking deeper as I swing, I curse my caddy.

Why? What does it mean?
Why does this golf ball hate me so?
When I try to smash it, it stares back
Undaunted, accusing, like Pilate in Dachau!
Devilish golf-ball! Now you
Crucify me
With your global intransigence.
You would poke at me with a sharpened stick
If only you had the hands for it.

5.00pm: I am still here, still in the bunker. Above me, the sky looms, glowering blacky blackest black like an electric eel in dark glasses spreadeagled on a blackboard against a black night sky. It is raining mercilessly hard, or would be if it weren't dry and sunny. Scattered showers are expected, if not today, tomorrow. And if not tomorrow, the day after. Or the day after that. I will be drenched like a goldfish. But I will not leave until I have hit my ball. We shall make our home here, here in the bunker. My golf ball is Adolf Hitler, and I his Eva Braun. Oh, caddy!

6.35pm: On the one hundred and eighty-ninth swing, the golf ball rises, slashing the air. Now it is in the rough, the roughest rough of roughs. I push a tee into the ground, like a hypodermic syringe pushing into a corpse. The ball is back, back, back in the air. I have described the golf ball, but how to describe the air? It is virtually invisible, almost see-through, yes – and sparsely furnished. There is not much going on in it: no men, no panthers, no lizards, no nothing. In short, it is *airy*.

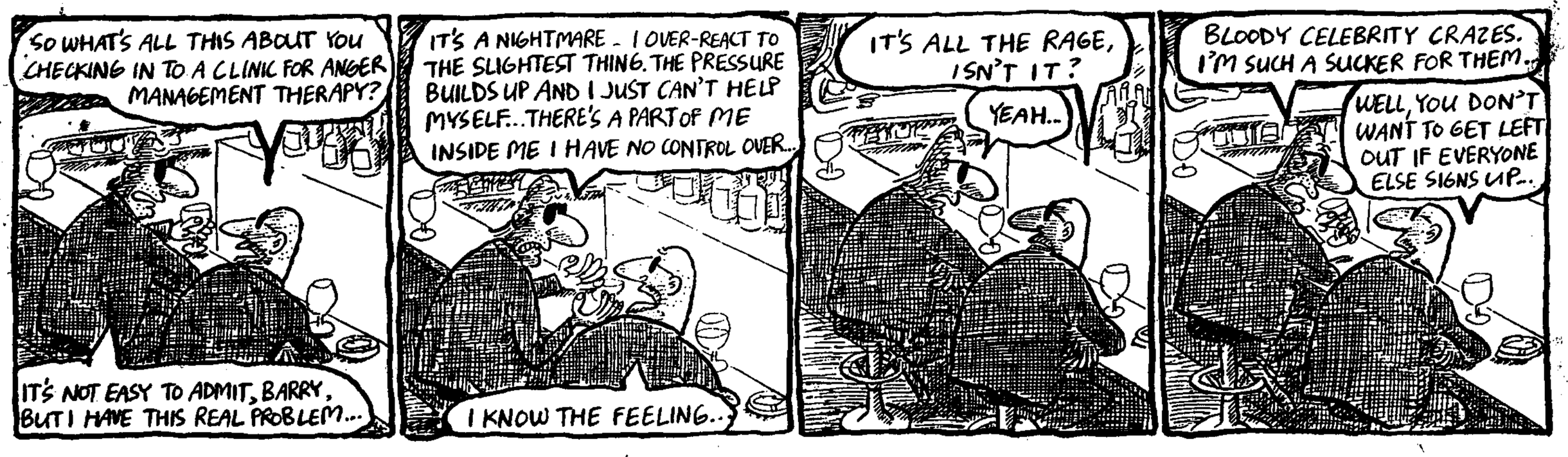
The ball teeters on the edge, looking over into the dark centre of the gaping hole. I knock it and it falls, falls, falls. Main fear: I am well below par. I am the prisoner in a cell of my own golfing. But was it like this for Virginia Woolf? When Virginia paraded around her local links did she cry out in pain after bunker trouble on the 2nd hole – or did she take a long, straight drive, ready for a straight birdy on the 3rd? A green seethe of jealousy bursts through the veins. *But I bet she was wretched useless rotten with her number five iron the cow.*

The earthen womb
Cries out for her baby ball back
With my putter, I knock the white round baby
Back into the womb.
The golf ball, shrieking, shrieking,
Hisses into the hole. Then –
Plop.

Friday 7.30pm: Fury jams the gullet. It is grown dark. After 211 shots I am only on the fourth hole. Like an axe, I go for the short cut: I place the ball in my right hand. Then I run around the rest of the course, dropping it in each hole as I pass.

Mummy, Mummy,
Why did you not teach me
Better golf? I hate you, Mummy.
Ungodly I hang my head
In shame. No ifs.
No putts.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN


SO WHAT'S ALL THIS ABOUT YOU CHECKING IN TO A CLINIC FOR ANGER MANAGEMENT THERAPY?
IT'S NOT EASY TO ADMIT, BARRY, BUT I HAVE THIS REAL PROBLEM...
IT'S A NIGHTMARE - I OVER-REACT TO THE SLIGHTEST THING. THE PRESSURE BUILDS UP AND I JUST CAN'T HELP MYSELF... THERE'S A PART OF ME INSIDE ME I HAVE NO CONTROL OVER..
I KNOW THE FEELING..
IT'S ALL THE RAGE, ISN'T IT?
YEAH..
BLOODY CELEBRITY CRAZES. I'M SUCH A SUCKER FOR THEM..
WELL, YOU DON'T WANT TO GET LEFT OUT IF EVERYONE ELSE SIGNS UP..

Literary Review

Dorian Gay

The Married Man
Edmund White
(Chatto & Windus, £16.99)
The Abomination
Paul Golding
(Picador, £16)

YOU are, let us say, a literary-minded gay male person in your mid-twenties. You hanker to write a novel. You would quite like to be the subject of sycophantic profiles in the *Guardian* and the *Observer*. How do you go about it? Well, dear reader, here are two books that will help you *lots*.

There are perhaps two main routes into the modern gay novel, now of course an immensely fashionable redoubt of the literary bourse, with its own styles, its own critics and — practically — its own prizes.

One, triumphantly personified by Edmund White's *The Married Man*, is the late-middleaged savant's elegy to lost glory, the been-there, seen-that, ah-but-you-should-have-been-on-Fire-Island-in-the-pre-plague-'70s-dawn-baby-cakes rendering down of past time. The other, as exemplified by Paul Golding's "outstanding literary debut", and so intimately connected to it as to take the form of a sub-genre, is the younger person's despatch from the 90s gay battlefield, an uninviting landscape crammed with bug-eyed Porky Pigs in leathers squaring up for the naughtiest kind of thrills.

What happens? *The Married Man*, brooding, melancholic and exceptionally astute and well-written, features a middleaged Paris-based American expat and his doomed relationship with a much younger boyfriend who dies from AIDS (White-fanciers will note the links to the earlier story *Palace Days*).

The Abomination is, er, well, perhaps I can convey something of its flavour by quoting the account of its hero, "Santiago Moore Zamorra" bless us, arriving at an, um, *specialist* niterie: "...my impression, instant and cold, is of being lowered morally, and medically, into a threatening pool, made pestilent by the seepage of sexual incontinency, fetid with the fumes of decomposing amyl nitrite, heavy with fungal sweat, rank and virile and truffled and glandular and muddled and strong with emanations of putrescent cheese and rotten eggs and cabbage and trenches and plagues." *Lawks* Mr Golding, I think we can see where *you're* coming from.

What qualities do you have to possess to be the hero of a modern gay novel? Ideally you work at some greenery-yallery occupation (Austin, White's chap, is an expert on eighteenth century French furniture) that gives you plenty of free time to head off round art galleries and cook appetising little suppers for eight but still, mysteriously, allows you a comfortable income.

You will be a howling cultural snob, highly educated and snooty about it, avid for foreign holidays in locales that don't admit *hoi polloi* (White offers a choice scene in which Austin accompanies his dying ex-lover Peter to — *gaarsh* — Disney World). And, whatever the depths of your sorrowing over a spangled, guiltless past, you will end up, more or less, as an archetype.

More so than any other branch of modern fiction, the gay novel is broadly speaking an exercise in, and defence of, sensibility. What to wear, where to go, what to buy and how to cook it. Everybody, but everybody, ends up in Venice — the gay man's Benidorm ever since Thomas Mann wrote *Death In Venice*; and everybody moons over the pretty pictures and the music, while serving up the most toothsome little déjeuners you ever ate. "But I love pike in a *beurre nantaise*" Julien, Austin's boyfriend, claims. Not to mention those old-fashioned chicken fricassees with mushrooms and pearl onions.

The effect of these opulent, upmarket style guides is wholly exclusive, and to the reader who doesn't happen to be gay or have the time to drift round the Louvre (avoiding the queues with their boyfriend's season ticket, naturally) is markedly exclusionist — an exotic, high-walled palisade wherein grey-haired veterans and their spiky-topped juniors essay erudite chatter while ravishing each other senseless.

Sleaze and sensibility. It was ever thus since E.M. Forster's *Maurice*. For, as a glance at the "Gay fiction" tables in Waterstone's quickly demonstrates, there is no such thing as a gay mainstream. It's either bodybuilders fisting each other or Proustian half-tones (or rather bodybuilders etc etc *and* Proustian half-tones). That is, of course, provided one can do the Proustian half-tones. White can, although he can turn overly preoccupied with the fin de siècle cultural gazetteer line.

As for *The Abomination*, Santiago's 515-page resume of a debauched and precious childhood plus his dealings with a contemporary mail-order goblin named Steve, well I couldn't suppress a smile over the account of our hero's early life that begins: "No beginning: just an ingrained sense of embarrassment, of ancient, premature sadness, of displacement, of too much knowledge too early on..." Quick, Austin, send for the pike in a *beurre nantaise*!

As ever in such cases one mourns the passing of a novelist like the late Tom Wakefield (author of *Mates*, *The Scarlet Boy* and others) who in a modestly successful career managed to write about more or less ordinary people living more or less ordinary lives rather than these self-fixated Dorian Grays.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"The perfect Mother's Day gift" –
Marrying the Mistress,
by Joanna Trollope.

— Advert, *Daily Mail*, 1 April.

THE inside cover of the new paperback of David Mitchell's *Ghostwritten* carries the endorsement: "An astounding novel — Tibor Fischer".

And the acknowledgements on the inside back page say: "Thank you to Michael Shaw, Jonathan Pegg, Tibor Fischer..."

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ WITH Waterstone's almost certainly on the verge of being sold — either to Bertelsmann, Borders or to founder Tim "Dan Dare" Waterstone in his latest bid to regain the family silver — it emerges, via *Publishing News*, that the chain is trying to force publishers into giving ever bigger discounts by threatening to exclude their products from future marketing campaigns.

Not documented in the piece, however, is the rather simpler tactic it uses to extract maximum value from small publishers: take as long as possible to pay them. One, however, is fighting back with some success.

Having hardly ever received payment within the 56 days stipulated on his invoices, and often having to wait much longer, Michael Oakley, proprietor of specialist railway publisher Sword Press, has taken to adding a line of small print demanding damages worth 1000% of the invoice value if the payment takes longer than a year to arrive.

The first shop to receive such a docket with its order was Waterstone's in Maidstone. Oakley tells the *Eye* that the arrival of the

"Well, enough about you..."

documentation resulted in "an immediate call from head office", after which a "cheque arrived without further comment".

■ WHILE the £310m acquisition of Dorling Kindersley by Pearson last week gave staff at the troubled illustrated publisher their first cause for celebration in ages, it is unclear what implications the deal has for the company's distribution.

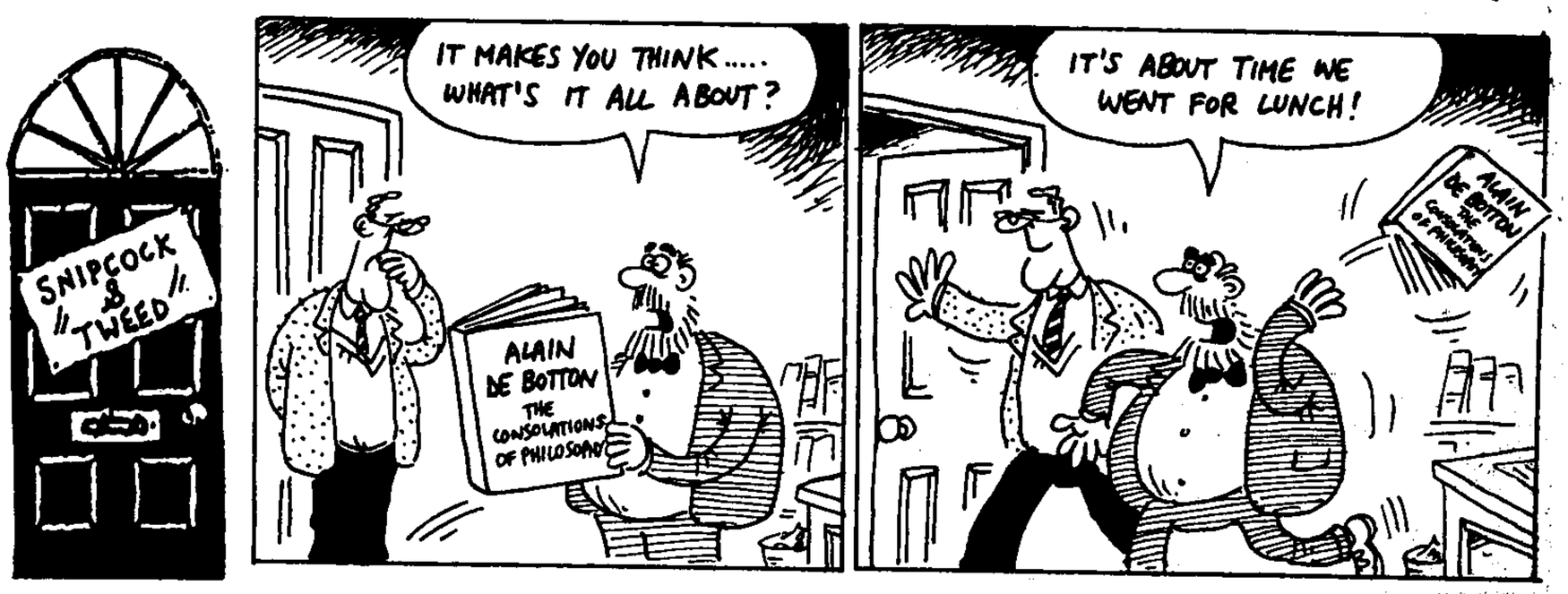
A fortnight ago Orion subsidiary Littlehampton Book Services announced that it had taken on DK's warehousing on a lucrative five-year contract. Stock had begun to arrive from DK's previous distributor, who had served notice on the publisher after they found themselves having to rent barns and outhouses throughout the Home Counties to accommodate the now-infamous 10 million-copy over-run of *Star Wars* tie-in books.

Unfortunately the distributor in question was, er, Pearson. If the board now decides that its new acquisition's affairs are best off kept within the family, LBS may find itself being paid off handsomely, with the books making an expensive return journey.

■ ON THE American edition of her much-hyped *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, Amanda Foreman is described as the "Winner of Britain's prestigious Whitbread Prize", whom "critics are already likening to Antonia Fraser".

Foreman's buxom charms, as displayed in her famous nude photo for *Tatler*, certainly justify the comparison with Lady Magnesia. But what's all this about the Whitbread? It was in fact Ted Hughes who won the prize, posthumously, with his poem *Birthday Letters*. Foreman, one of the runners-up, won only the biographical section, which is not at all the same thing — as Amanda and her publishers must surely know.

'Bookworm'


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
IT MAKES YOU THINK..... WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?
ALAIN DE BOTTON THE CONSOLATIONS OF PHILOSOPHY
IT'S ABOUT TIME WE WENT FOR LUNCH!
ALAIN DE BOTTON THE CONSOLATIONS OF PHILOSOPHY

IN THE BACK

MORE COCK AND BULL

AS IF it were not bad enough that the soon-to-be privatised police records are so inaccurate they are not worth the hard disc they are stored on, it now emerges that probation records are equally useless.

A second critical report on the costly Crams, the Case Record and Management Systems developed by the computer firm Bull, has revealed how a sex offender very nearly got a sensitive job through the "new deal" because his Crams record showed only a couple of minor crimes. It was only because a clerical officer recognised the offender's name that further checks were made and a possible disaster averted.

The report, by consultants acting for Merseyside probation service, also concluded that the "illogical, inflexible and unforgiving" system was causing an "unacceptably high risk of stress to staff". As well as increasing workloads, there was conflict with managers who were unaware of the difficulties with the system and fears that the system could lead to serious mistakes.

Merseyside is not alone. Last week Northampton probation worker Patricia Collins quit her job after informing home office minister Paul Boateng that stress and bullying triggered by Crams was forcing people to resign. In her open letter she said the *Eye* had highlighted the waste of £9m – the cost of Crams so far. "But what about the human cost, in suffering, stress, tears, and the many sleepless nights that caused me and so many people to leave the service's employment?"

The National Association of Probation Officers (NAPO) has been telling the home office for five years that the system is pitifully flawed. Curiously, though, the home office seems determined to carry on with yet another version of Crams. Copernicus, which was supposed to replace Crams, is itself now "under review"; and Steve Goodwin, the IT specialist brought in to sort out the mess, has left at the end of his contract. Could the home office be sticking with the useless Crams system because of the £100m deal it signed with Bull?

The Miller's Tale

***EYE* readers will no doubt recall the strange story of Patrick Nicholls, who spent 23 years in prison for a crime that was never committed. Almost as inexplicable is the related case of the prison officer who has just been cleared of stealing £3 worth of official paper which was probably never stolen.**

Since he was arrested, Patrick Nicholls protested his complete innocence of the murder of Gladys Heath in Worthing in 1975. He claims as part of his defence that he had been visited in Lewes prison by the two Sussex police officers in charge of his case, DCI Keith Cantle and DI Gordon Harrison. Both officers, he claimed, had aggressively contested his protestations of innocence.

All the way up to Nicholls' first appeal in 1977, the two officers denied this visit. When they finally admitted it, they claimed they were investigating forged rent books: a claim which, according to the criminal cases review commission, "passes belief".

In November 1991 the governor of Lewes prison confirmed in an official letter to his opposite number at Kingston that the officers had indeed visited Nicholls in prison, and provided documentary proof of the visit. The sudden appearance of these letters in 1991 infuriated and embarrassed the Sussex officers.

In 1997 suspicion fell on Ron Miller, a prison officer at Kingston who had befriended Nicholls and sympathised with his case. Quick as a flash, the officers concluded that Miller had stolen the letters from prison files and made them available to Nicholls' long campaign for his release.

On 8 July 1997 Miller was charged with stealing the documents. Early in 1998, a forensic report from Belfast University revealed that Mrs Heath had died of heart failure and had almost certainly not been murdered at all (for the details, see *Eye* 949, Murdered She Wasn't). After an embarrassed hearing at the court of appeal in June 1998, Nicholls' conviction was quashed.

The theft charge against Ron Miller, however, continued. On one occasion British Telecom was ordered to provide records on the ludicrous pretext that Mr Miller was to be charged with perverting the course of justice. Two and half years later, during which Mr Miller was dragged in front of 12 magistrates and four crown court judges, he eventually arrived at Portsmouth crown court last month charged with the theft of £3 worth of official documents.

The case lasted five days. Miller's lawyer complained that the prosecution had not been able to prove even that the documents were stolen, still less that Miller had stolen them. Indeed, long before Miller could have even known about them, the documents had been in Patrick Nicholls' possession!

The jury members were impressed. Ron Miller was acquitted. The case against him is generously estimated to have cost half a million pounds.

Countryside misalliance?

THE ridiculous charges brought by Essex police against young eco-warrier Christiana Tugwell have finally been dropped by the crown prosecution service (CPS).

The 16 year old, who had been trying to save woodland in Hockley from property developers, was charged under 1992 trade union legislation (for hindering a workman in the use of his tools) after she tried to prevent Countryside Properties from taking chainsaws to the trees.

As well as the imaginative choice of legislation under which she was charged, there were serious questions about whether Inspector Knacker was aware of high court orders and agreements which restrained Countryside's agents from harassment.

Knacker has always seemed keener to enforce the law on behalf of Countryside than on behalf of protestors or their supporters. Complaints that heavy-handed security guards hired by Countryside had assaulted and intimidated protestors have been met with the suggestion that there is nothing the police can do because the battle for Hockley woods is a "civil" dispute.

Police have taken this line even when complaints have related to a 38ft wide lane adjacent to the site, leading to Christian's mother's house. Mrs Maria Tugwell told the *Eye* that guards had blocked the right of way and intimidated and harassed her visitors. They have continued to do so, even after the land has been cleared and the protest camp disbanded.

Letters of complaint about the apparent "immunity from prosecution" of Countryside and its agents have gone to David Stevens, Essex's chief constable. And the complainants are investigating whether they now have a "civil" dispute with the police.

Morality play

MEMBERS of Chris Woodhead, chief inspector of schools, will recall with relief the forthright statement from his solicitors when he was confronted by the *News of the World* with the allegation that he had had an extra-marital affair with one of his students.

The statement clarified the matter completely. Woodhead, it declared, "did not have a sexual relationship or any improper relationship with Amanda Johnston when he was a teacher and she was a pupil". They had not got together, said the statement which was apparently backed by an affidavit, until "a long time afterwards".

The statement ended with an unforgettable assurance: "In any event he (the Chief Inspector) does not purport to be the guardian of social or moral [illegible] He has never preached moral standards or [illegible]

arresting heading on 11 February, under which Woodhead wrote: "While the teaching of moral standards in schools is not an end in itself, it is a necessary prerequisite for a stable and harmonious community where all can work and achieve to their highest potential."

Perhaps, Mr Woodhead should start by writing out a thousand times:

1. I shall not have any more affairs with my students.

2. I shall not, even through my lawyers, lie about them to the *News of The World*.

Out of the flying pan

EARLY on the morning of 4 October last, Captain Steve Leech was flying a BAe 146-300 full of passengers on a scheduled flight from Aberdeen to Amsterdam, when his controls "froze" or locked up.

He immediately transmitted an emergency "pan pan pan" call and was diverted to Stansted where, after a safe landing, the aircraft was inspected by Air Accident Investigation Branch (AAIB) officials from Farnborough. As they cogitated on their findings, the aircraft – registration G-UKID, owned by KLM UK – was cleared to fly on.

In fact it wasn't the first time G-UKID had suffered frozen controls. After an earlier incident (and another emergency landing) engineers from the airline and the manufacturers, British Aerospace, carried out an extensive, expensive and ultimately inconclusive check of the aircraft.

Nor was it the last. Just a month after the Stansted incident G-UKID broadcast another pan pan pan message and made another emergency landing, this time at Norwich. Once again the AAIB was called in: another indication that it was a close call.

When BAe was asked for information about these incidents, it demurred. It took eight weeks and many reminders before the company replied, indicating the urgency the company attaches to matters of passenger safety. But BAe's response was hardly worth waiting for. Hiding behind the coat-tails of investigators, it confirmed the incidents but said no details would be given "since the AAIB are preparing a report that has not been published".

Meanwhile G-UKID is again back in the air. It generally takes well over a year for an AAIB report to be published. So the many thousands of passengers carried during that time are condemned to fly in ignorance of the perils faced by their predecessors and now by them.

WELL AND TRULY NEEDLED

YVETTE COOPER, the parliamentary under secretary of state for health, got herself in a terrible tangle in a recent Commons debate on the subject of vaccines manufactured with bovine material.

As *Eye* readers will recall, she had had fair warning of the sort of difficulty she was in when she was closely questioned on the subject back in December by Norman Baker, the Liberal Democrat MP for Lewes.

Mr Baker's allegation, which he freely admits he gleaned from *Eye* articles last year, was that vaccines made from bovine material continued to be injected into children after 1989 when BSE was first identified in British beef. He had already ascertained from Cooper (see *Eye* 994) that stocks of vaccine made from beef which could have been infected by BSE were used on children between 1989 and 1992.

In the debate on 28 March (some of which was dressed up as an *Express* exclusive two days later) Baker pointed out that "millions of people, predominantly children, were given vaccines containing bovine material from the UK herd at a time when that herd included cows suffering from BSE".

He noted that previous health ministers (notably Jeff Rooker) has been wrong to assert that the main risk to human health from BSE came from eating beef. On the contrary, he insisted, a much greater risk came from injecting infected vaccines. He noted that three years at least went by after the BSE scare in 1989 before anyone can be sure that all bovine material used in vaccines had come from countries like New Zealand where there is no BSE.

How many vaccinations using possibly infected bovine material was used in those three years, he asked. And why, he demanded, was there "so little vigour on the part of the department of health when public health was at risk".

The unfortunate minister had no reply. She absolved only one vaccine manufacturer, Wellcome, which she said had always used bovine material from outside the UK. No other company was mentioned. She went on to give the expiry dates for the use of vaccines stockpiled in 1989 — for diphtheria-tetanus the expiry date was June 1993, and for diptheria-tetanus-polio November 1993. She said: "Many of the vaccines will have been used before the expiry dates, but those are the last expiry dates I have been given."

Norman Baker then asked: "Does this mean that no vaccines were recalled after the identification of the risk?"

The minister replied: "I shall write to the hon. gentleman on that issue, because one of the vaccines may have been replaced." The same vagueness confused the minister's entire speech. "Vaccines," she said, "were issued directly by the manufacturers and were not bought centrally by the department of health, as happens now. Therefore, there are no figures available on vaccine usage for that period." The minister in charge of public health could not disclose how much vaccine made from bovine material had been used on British children in the years when that material was most likely to have been infected by BSE.

No one (except possibly the manufacturers who are keeping quiet) knows how many children were vaccinated with vaccines made with BSE-infected material.

Manufacturers of vaccines are still heavily represented on the government's "watchdog" Committee on Safety of Medicines. No fewer than 10 members of the committee declare an interest in the biggest vaccine manufacturer in the world, SmithKline Beecham. These interests include one shareholder (Dr M. Donaghy); one who gets "fees and shares" (Dr B. Evans); two who declare a consultancy (Professor R. Dargle and Dr A. MacGowan); and one who declares "occasional meetings" (Prof J.H. Smyth). The other interests are all "non-personal" such as research grants and clinical trials.

Other interests of CSM members in vaccine manufacture include research grants from Pasteur Merieux and Merck Sharpe and Dohme. Pharmaceutical companies are also well represented on the government body looking into BSE-related diseases, SEAC, which also subscribes to the view that the main danger from BSE, if any, comes from eating beef. Commercial interests of SEAC members include drug companies such as Bochringer Ingelheim, Abbott Laboratories, Abbott Pharmaceuticals, Merck and Pfizer.

High Principals

THE BRASS NOB'S ON

SO GREAT was the grief and angst at De Montfort University at the departure last September of vice-chancellor Professor Kenneth Barker CBE that special measures were obviously called for.

A new Barker lecture theatre was duly named in the professor's honour, but that was not enough. Artist Sean Henry was commissioned to design a life-size brass statue of the great man (see picture), estimated cost: £30,000. The masterpiece was unveiled at a ceremony in December by former De Montfort governor and ex-director of the Victoria and Albert museum, Dame Elizabeth Esteve-Coll. Prof Barker is not resting on his laurels. He has taken up a new post as vice chancellor of Thames Valley University.

Historical note: Simon De Montfort was a testy Leicestershire baron who made history by calling barons and burghers to a representative assembly. He was eventually killed in battle, and his name celebrated ever since as a founder of British parliamentary democracy. There is no statue to him at the university named after him, so he was obviously not as vital a figure as Prof Barker.

SINGAPORE SLINGS

A CONVENIENT and topical way of making money for prestigious British universities is to strike a deal to provide services for colleges in the Far East. One advantage of such deals is that any complaint about standards in the Far Eastern colleges can be written off as the inevitable result of cultural differences and brushed aside.

The London School of Economics, for instance, has a juicy deal to mark economics diploma exam papers from the Stansfield Business School in Singapore.

But all is not as it should be in Singapore. For example, ex-pat staff at Stansfield were rather shocked when they suddenly had their hours of work increased from 34 to 44 hours a week, and when they found their personal correspondence being opened at random by their superiors.

They took their complaints to the LSE, where they were met with a stern refusal to take any of them further. Rosemary Gosling, director of external studies at LSE, told the *Eye*: "Some of the matters raised are matters of employment policy which we don't regulate and presumably reflect local law and practice." Three lecturers who complained were so impressed with Mrs Gosling's response they walked out without any intention to return.

FACT TO REMEMBER: London University's overall contract with Stansfield is worth at least £1m.

Even more mysterious is the relationship between the privately-owned Asian University of Science and Technology in Thailand (AUST) and London's Imperial College. The Thai University claims its courses are validated by Imperial College, but Imperial College denies the claim. Such exaggerated claims from overseas institutions, says the rector of Imperial, Lord Oxburgh, are "something we have to live with". Lord Oxburgh and his colleagues also have to live with £330,000 plus travel expenses which they got since 1996 from AUST in Thailand, even though on the college's own admission no one at Imperial College has carried out any consultancy work.

Seven ex-pat lecturers at AUST wrote to the *Times Higher Education Supplement* in November with a number of complaints. Two of them are owed £20,000, and have little hope of retrieving a penny.

Very fishy: the report that got away

WHEN nearly a quarter of a million factory-farm salmon died mysteriously in cages owned by Marine Harvest Ltd in Loch Hourn to the north of Fort William last June, Professor David Mackay, north region director of Sepa, the Scottish environment pollution agency, said: "If we submit a report to the procurator fiscal asking for criminal proceedings to be instigated then I may be unable to comment further for several months."

On 23 July he noted: "I am able to confirm that our investigations are complete and a report is being sent to the procurator fiscal."

Whoops! Eight months later, on 24 March this year, the procurator fiscal in Portree, Skye, which should have received the report, said his office had received... no such report. Could Sepa have sent the report to the wrong office? Calls to fiscals in Inverness, Dingwall and Fort William all produced the same response: no, they hadn't received any report asking for criminal proceedings to be taken against the Loch Hourn fish-killers.

Following the Sepa investigation, when Marine Harvest was found to be operating 46 cages in Loch Hourn, rather than the approved 32, the company continued to use the extra cages for rearing fish. Prof Mackay said: "It was considered that the number of cages on site then did not constitute a significant breach of consent conditions." Marine Harvest has since applied to Sepa for consent to increase production from 1,200 tonnes to 1,950 tonnes — which will, if granted, legalise the use of the illegal cages at present in the loch.

But the fate of the "report that got away" remains a mystery, which will be deeply embarrassing for Scottish executive (SE) fishery minister "Red" John Home Robertson. On 14 January he wrote: "You are already aware that the Loch Hourn incident is sub judice. In the circumstances it would not be appropriate for me to comment." Which is convenient, given the seriousness of the Loch Hourn incident.

Dave Wyman, of the SE rural affairs department, wrote to Marine Harvest expressing "deep concern about a number of issues including welfare, site security and mortality disposal. The actual stocking level at the time of the incident with regard to the farm's discharge consent is a matter for the Scottish environment protection agency." Yes, indeedy.

Meanwhile Marine Harvest continues to keep Sepa well exercised. Sepa did submit a report (on 25 Feb) to the fiscal's office in Fort William in connection with another Marine Harvest incident in nearby Loch Lochy. And, yes, this time the fiscal confirms it was received.

If no report regarding the Loch Hourn incident were sent to the fiscal, it may be impossible for Sepa to submit one now: after six months it might be "time-barred". Sighs of relief, no doubt, from Marine Harvest; but a glorious cock-up for the SE and Sepa.

You can contact Paul Foot on 0171 287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

MAN IN THE EYE

WHAT have Robert Maxwell, Tiny Rowland and Mohamed Fayed in common? Answer: each has been the subject of a book by Tom Bower, and each has hired George Carman QC to frighten off publishers and booksellers with pre-emptive threats of libel action. Bower's next book is an unauthorised life of Sir Richard Branson – and, lo and behold, m'learned friend Carman has swung into action again.

It was two weeks ago, late on the afternoon of 22 March, that Bower took a call from *Times* hack Andrew Pierce, who wondered if he knew that Branson was suing him. Bower did not. A few minutes later, however, the doorbell rang and a writ was served.

The *Times* has long been Branson's favourite newspaper. It serialised his autobiography, *Losing My Virginity*, and it first published his allegations that Guy Snowden of GTech had tried to bribe him. On 31 December last year, when Branson's knighthood was announced, *Times* hack Jon Ashworth described him as a man who "has long blazed a trail in British business... His exploits in balloons and boats have captured the public imagination". A day later, apparently worried by the inadequacy of this tribute, Ashworth returned to the subject: "Branson sets an astonishing pace... He remains an inspiration to legions of young entrepreneurs."

Branson Pickle

And so the arslikhan has continued. On 12 February, for instance, the *Times* "revealed" Branson's plan to sell cars on the internet, in a 1,000-word story that read more like a Virgin press release. ("After ordering on their personal computers, customers will be able to have their new car delivered directly to their door... For customers who want to make the buying of cars an adventure, Virgin will offer a package including a weekend mini-break to Europe.")

Another news story two weeks later gave this objective assessment of his lottery bid: "Camelot is the safe choice, yet the lottery has become dull. The Branson magic might be just what is called for." Even an article about Branson's charitable scheme to locate landmines in former war zones (17 March) worked in a free plug for Sir Richard's corporate brand: "Virgin has funded the technology..."

Similar puff-pieces appear every week, as a glance at other recent *Times* headlines reveals: "Branson Gambles on Putting Fun Back Into Lottery"; "Branson Joins Bid for Atlantic Speed Record"; "Branson Cashes in on Another of His High-Flyers"; "Virgin phone for Australia"; "New Millionaire Every Day for Branson Lottery"; "Branson Ready to Put His Brand on the Net"; "Branson Plans £5bn Virgin.com Flotation".

The paper's willingness to act as a shameless cheerleader may not be unrelated to the fact that Branson's best friends (and next-door neighbours in Oxfordshire) are Peter and Ceris Emerson, who just happen to be the parents-in-law of *Times* editor Peter Stothard. Through the Emerson connection, Branson and Stothard have become great chums.

No surprise, then, that the *Thunderer* should have known about the libel suit against Bower even before the defendant. But in other respects the writ is very surprising indeed.

Branson is suing over an article on his lottery bid, written by Bower for the London *Evening Standard* on 14 December 1999, which described him as a "professional self-publicist" well known for his "ambition, vanity and self-promotion". Since Branson claims this is a most defamatory allegation, we must presumably infer that the "Richard Branson" who posed stark naked for the *Sun* to promote his memoirs, like the "Richard Branson" who appears in the adverts for Virgin Direct, is some other chap altogether.

As soon as the piece appeared, Branson rang Max "Hitler" Hastings to ask for a right of reply – which was duly granted. A month later, however, Branson suddenly wrote to Bower demanding an apology in the *Standard*. Bower pointed out that this was something he ought to take up with the paper and its editor.

In his statement of claim, Branson says that this answer caused him "further distress" and merits "aggravated damages" – though it was actually no more than a statement of the obvious, since ultimately the *Standard* would have to decide whether an apology was justified. (Besides, Branson himself is not averse to delivering equally "distressing" brush-offs. When Bower requested an interview with him while researching his biography, the Virgin king replied curtly

that "little benefit or pleasure would come from our meeting".)

Another surprising feature of the case is that Branson's writ names only Bower as the defendant, where normally a plaintiff would also sue the paper and editor who published the article. Did he hope that the *Evening Standard* would leave a freelance contributor to fight his own battle? If so, he miscalculated: Hitler Hastings promptly announced that Bower, whom he has known for 30 years, would have the full financial and legal support of Associated Newspapers.

Bower's book is due out in September. But a more imminent date in Branson's mind is June, when the lottery bosses will decide whether to extend Camelot's licence or hand it instead to his "People's Lottery". Branson plays down his own involvement in the lottery bid, claiming to be merely one of seven "non-executive" directors in the consortium, but this is too modest by half: he is in fact the sole shareholder of The People's Lottery Ltd. The lottery commissioners' decision will essentially be a verdict on Branson's own reputation. Can he raise the £15bn he has promised for good causes? And can his management team can be trusted to run the enterprise efficiently?

His recent record raises serious doubts on both counts. Although Branson boasts that "I'll be Frank" in his Virgin Direct adverts, it's impossible to get a full picture of the health of the Virgin empire thanks to his fondness for secretive offshore holding companies. But what little information is available doesn't inspire confidence.

Bring Out the Lawyers

Virgin Cola has accumulated debts of at least £40m. Victory Corporation (his clothing and cosmetics business) is effectively worthless. V2 Music, his record label, has lost about £100m during its brief lifetime. Virgin Express, his other airline, is also losing money. It may or may not be coincidence that several of his companies which were due to file their accounts last December have still not done so.

True, the much-reviled Virgin Rail Group now makes a modest profit – but this is only because of government subsidies, which are due to end next year. (Anyway, his train business is hardly a glowing example of managerial competence, as countless rail travellers can testify.) The other profitable enterprise is Virgin Atlantic, but this too will no longer be of much benefit to him since he sold off 49 percent of it to Singapore Airlines just before Christmas, for £600m.

Branson denied at the time that there was any sort of "cash crisis" in the Virgin group which might have prompted the sale. But it turns out that much of the windfall will be needed immediately to pay off his debts – most notably in Virgin Entertainment, which owns the Megastores and more than 200 Our Price record shops.

In the middle of January, when Branson suddenly demanded an apology from Bower, Virgin Entertainment was refusing to pay record companies £35m which they were owed for supplying CDs to the shops over Christmas. The four main record distributors, understandably furious, threatened to cut off supplies altogether unless they were paid. At a meeting on 31 January, Simon Wright of Virgin Entertainment and Stephen Murphy, Branson's finance director, begged them to be patient, explaining that Virgin Entertainment had debts of £194m and couldn't raise any more money from the banks – which were already clamouring for repayment of existing loans and overdrafts.

The pressure on Branson mounted in early February when John Kennedy of Universal Records (which was owed £10m) prepared a formal winding-up notice against Virgin. Eventually, after further pleading, the record companies agreed to carry on providing stock but only if they were paid up-front, in cash. And so, every Monday morning, Wright had to get a huge cash float from his HQ in Wood Green and hand it over to the record companies in return for another batch of chart hits.

Since the banks won't provide any more credit, Branson has had to rely on the proceeds of his Virgin Atlantic sale. On 27 March, as soon as the European commission (EC) formally approved the deal with Singapore Airlines, he promised the banks and record companies that he would use some of the loot to pay off the £194m debts and plough another £50m of working capital into the business over the next three months. Rather eccentrically, however, he also announced that the Our Price chain would be turned into mobile-phone shops selling a few records on the side – which could be a recipe for disaster in the already overcrowded phone market. What with the existing losses and debts at V2 and Virgin Cola, it can't be long before much of the Singapore dosh has gone.

Planes, Trains & Mobile Phones

Since hacks prefer to regurgitate Branson's hype than study his balance sheets, almost none of this has been reported. If the lottery commissioners become aware of it, however, they might begin to wonder if he's the ideal figurehead for a "People's Lottery". No wonder he is so desperate to shut Bower up, and to deter newspapers from employing him. When the *Daily Mail* ran a piece by Bower on 1 March (headed "Should This Man Run the Lottery?"), Branson fired off an angry fax denying that the Virgin group had any connection with his lottery consortium – a point only slightly sabotaged by the ID at the top of the fax, which read "Virgin Management Company".

Branson has long relied on bluster and bullying to silence his critics. One striking example was a *Guardian* article in October 1991, headlined "Will Branson's Balloon Burst?", which argued that "behind the Man with the Midas touch there is a picture of a highly indebted and not-very-profitable conglomerate". Branson wrote a half-page feature denouncing the allegations as a pack of lies – which the *Grauniad*, fearful of a libel writ, agreed to publish.

Seven years later, in his memoirs, Branson admitted the real reason for his incandescent reaction: that the *Guardian* had come dangerously close to the truth. "It really looked as if my world was falling apart," he wrote. "Even Virgin Music was having difficulties. And the airline was stretched to breaking point." Lloyds Bank, whose loans to Virgin Atlantic were guaranteed by Virgin Music, was becoming "increasingly concerned" by the size of Branson's overdraft. The *Grauniad* investigation "caught us at our most vulnerable... If such an article had appeared in the *Financial Times*, the banks could well have pulled out their loans and brought the Virgin Group crashing down."

Now Branson again has problems with financial overstretch – and is again trying to intimidate journalists who question his Midas Touch. Luckily for him, most newspapers are happy to swallow his propaganda.

Simon Burridge, the advertising wallah marketing Branson's lottery bid, tells the *Sunday Telegraph* that "Richard is the popular choice and it wouldn't be sensible not to use the faith that people have in him to the benefit of the lottery." But how much faith does Branson deserve? This, lest we forget, is the man who promised that Virgin Cola would be outselling Pepsi by the year 2000. Shurely shome mishtake, Sir Richard?

Roy Hamilton

IN Slicker's In The City column (*Eye* 968) we reported on the legal proceedings between the late Tiny Rowland and Harrods and referred to the locksmith engaged by Harrods to open Mr Rowland's safe deposit box. We are happy to make it clear that Mr Hamilton, the locksmith in question, was not warned by the trial judge about self-incrimination as he had not himself been accused of criminal conduct.

In the City

ALL THE frenzied discussion about the imminent return to Britain of the Baron of Belize has overlooked one central point about that great British patriot Michael Ashcroft. Just how much UK tax will the man who liked the Tory party so much that he bought it be paying once he moves to the land of hope and glory so beloved by William Hague?

Ashcroft has been very quiet on this sensitive subject. What a surprise! Because the answer is almost certainly far less than he and his bought-and-paid-for party leader puppet would like it to appear.

Ashcroft has been talking up his intention to "become a British taxpayer and full-time resident" (*Sunday Telegraph*, 2 April) since settling his libel action with the *Times* last December. But significantly there has been no movement in that direction before the start of the new tax year.

Note that the patriotic Ashcroft jetted in and jetted out with maybe just an overnight stay for the Tory conference at Harrogate the day after his peerage was announced. The Baron of Belize still has to be careful not to overstay his welcome and become UK tax resident by default through lingering more than 90 nights in the land he yearns to serve.

Here are the billion-dollar questions that should now be put to the not so noble Lord Tax Haven and his Tory serfs.

From 6 April 2000 does he intend to become "resident" for UK tax purposes?

The answer to this question is probably but not inevitably "yes" if he is to be a working peer.

It will be hard not to be at his Westminster home more than the 90 days/nights limit. After three years Ashcroft would then become "ordinarily resident" for tax purposes. The normal consequence then would be that, like most of the British electorate and his fellow peers, Lord Tax Haven would become liable for UK tax on his worldwide income and capital gains, plus inheritance tax. But that leads to the next and more crucial question.

Will Ashcroft be "domiciled" in Britain for UK tax purposes?

The answer here according to tax experts is almost certainly "no" because this is the key to the Baron of Belize protecting his tax-free billionaire status.

Because Ashcroft has been a tax exile since the 80s it will be surprising if he has not established a new domicile of choice — replacing a British domicile of origin. This is hardly likely to be in the tax prone United States, despite his Florida home. It is much more likely to be in the tax-free climes of Bermuda, home to an Ashcroft family trust, if not his beloved Belize.

Assuming Ashcroft remains non-domiciled for UK tax, which he can do while living here and being resident for UK tax, then he will only be taxable in Britain on the income or capital he remits or is paid here. Which will undoubtedly be minimal, restricted to funding his living costs (or the Tories) plus any benefits provided by offshore companies, such as his Westminster home, cars and executive jets.

Tax experts suggest that Ashcroft would be able to keep UK tax free most if not all of his £250,000 salary as chairman of Carlisle Holdings plus, more importantly, any capital gains from sales of his Carlisle or Tyco International shares. Which leads to the final question.

Does Ashcroft intend to bring all or any of his income (salary or dividends, also more than £200,000 a year) or his billionaire fortune back to the UK so that it is liable for future capital gains and inheritance tax to become equal with those whom he claims to want to join?

Given that Ashcroft has spent more than a decade avoiding tax while turning financial engineering into an art form in order to create his fortune from first ADT, then Tyco and now Carlisle the answer again looks likely to be a resounding "no".

Offshore family trusts such as those which appear to control Ashcroft's stakes in the also offshore registered Tyco and Carlisle are under constant attack from the Inland Revenue. But trusts established while Ashcroft was a UK tax exile would remain invulnerable to Revenue assault so long as he retained non-UK domicile. That highly prized status provides Lord Tax Haven with total flexibility as to what if any UK tax he pays. Michael Ashcroft will have the fortunate status of a voluntary UK taxpayer. And if one day, having obtained the peerage he craved so long and for which he paid so much, he tires of the Tories, then the Baron of Belize can fly away once more and rejoin his fortune in a tax haven far away.

AS THE Department of Timidity & Inactivity grinds its way along the paper trail of share deals done by the *Mirror*'s City Slickers, certain of the stockbrokers who did business with Anil Bhoyrul and James Hipwell are becoming increasingly nervous. Bhoyrul and Hipwell increasingly look dead in the water but they may not be alone.

DTI investigators are said to be examining suggestions that the *Mirror* spivs may have been paid to ramp certain companies by brokers with big positions in shares with small markets. A *Mirror* puff provided a unique opportunity to unload.

Then there is the way many of the Slickers' tips were correctly predicted on certain internet bulletin boards. This had already attracted the interest of the Financial Services Authority over accurate predictions of what was to be in the *Mirror* within 24 or 48 hours. Knowingly or not, the greedy Slickers were sharing their hot tips with a number of bigger and better City spivs. Something the DTI is unlikely to ignore.

Another line of inquiry relates to rumours that the two spivs were not averse to betting on the shares they tipped through stock market index bookmakers. Such bets leave far less trace than dealing in the shares even though the two spivs, especially Hipwell, dealt regularly ahead of their own tips.

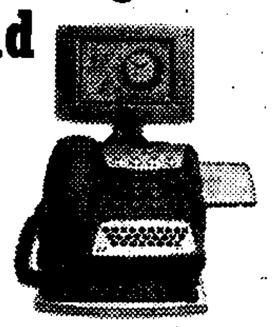
Which makes the task for Trinity Mirror as it struggles to save editor Piers Morgan and his team of avid share-dealers that much greater. Just how ignorant of City rules and employees activities can editor "Moron" be before he becomes negligent if not culpable?

THE MYSTERY of how Versailles managed to conceal such an elaborate fraud of overstating its revenues and profits for so long is certain to focus on the role of fugitive finance director Frederick Clough and his little helpers, auditors Nunn Hayward. But now it is suggested that Nunn Hayward may have been auditors in little more than name. There are rumours that the unreal book-keeping was done by another firm in north London, which in turn was a front for an unqualified accountant known to Clough. If true that would explain a lot.

Meanwhile it is said that the man who knew too little and made too much, Versailles founder and chief executive Carl Cushnie, has retained the services of renowned defenders of the innocent Peters & Peters. Clearly Cushnie expects bad things from his £29m share sale ahead of the Versailles implosion.

Stock Horror

Sir Alan Sugar's Amstrad



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THOSE who look to the Saville inquiry into Bloody Sunday to deliver a successful verdict will be reassured to know that two celebrated alumni of the Serious Farce Office play key roles in running the inquiry: John Tate, the Fat Controller of Maxwell fame, and Gordon Dickinson, considered unnecessary to oversee the upcoming Stephen Hinchliffe trial, head the inquiry team. Not that this is all boring paperwork. Tate in particular is understood to have enjoyed expensive trips to the Middle East and Australia interviewing witnesses. But then the inquiry is being run on a money-no-object basis for the myriad lawyers involved. Clearly the SFO's loss will once again be somebody's gain.

THE Septic Isle of Jersey is proving very helpful to Judge Richard Gee by delaying if not obstructing attempts by Scotland Yard to obtain evidence to prosecute him for defrauding the legal aid board.

For many months fraud squad detectives have been thwarted from obtaining details of Jersey bank accounts and companies linked to Gee. The information is crucial to proving that Gee lied when obtaining legal aid for his 1998 mortgage fraud trial which ended without a verdict. Gee avoided a retrial thanks to the ludicrous decision of attorney-general John Morris that it would be "too stressful"!

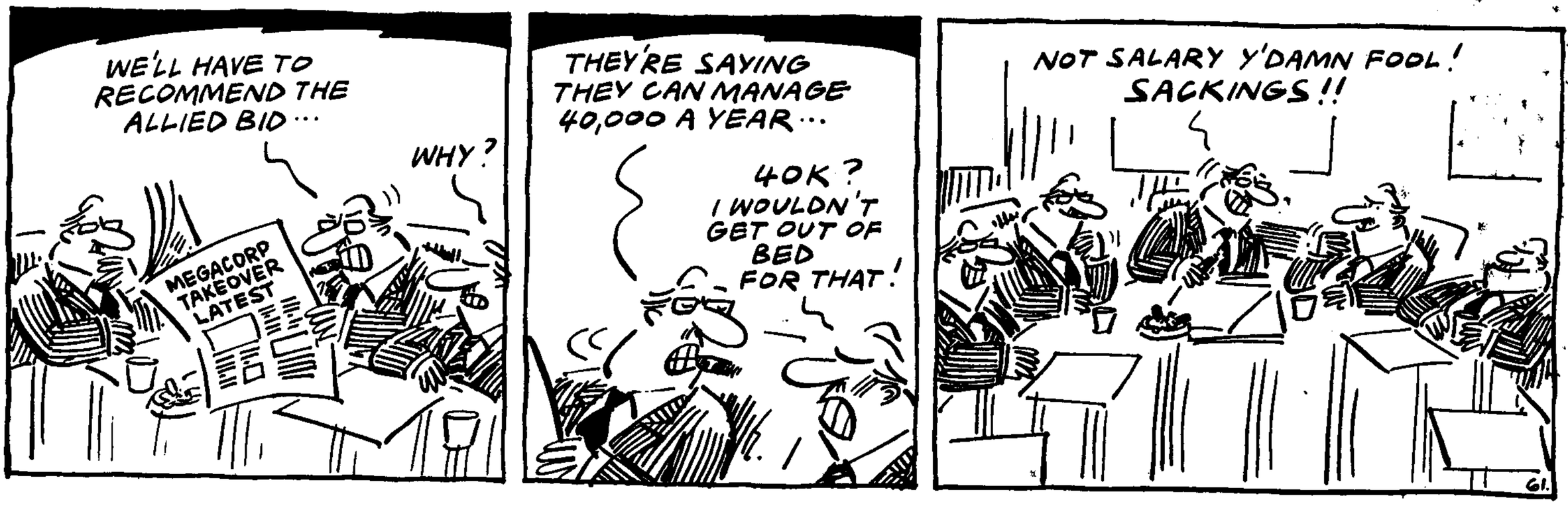
But the lord chancellor's office is less forgiving and is eager to prosecute Gee over the up-to £1m in legal aid he received by claiming insufficient personal assets. Police believe they have evidence that he hid offshore assets to obtain legal aid.

However, the Jersey authorities are claiming they cannot help unless Gee is first charged because his case is not covered by the new mutual assistance agreement. But that is difficult without the information in Jersey. Meanwhile Gee continues to receive his £87,000 salary and, unless he is charged, may yet receive a £500,000 pension settlement.

'Slicker'

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE/RIGG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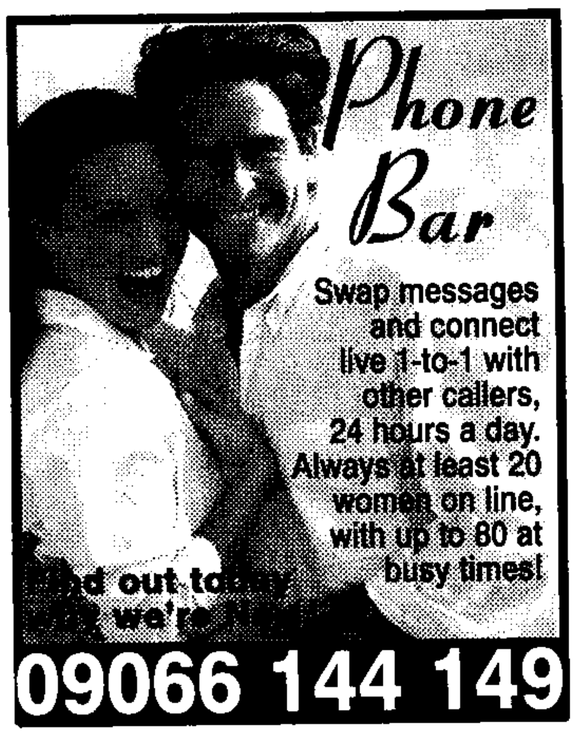
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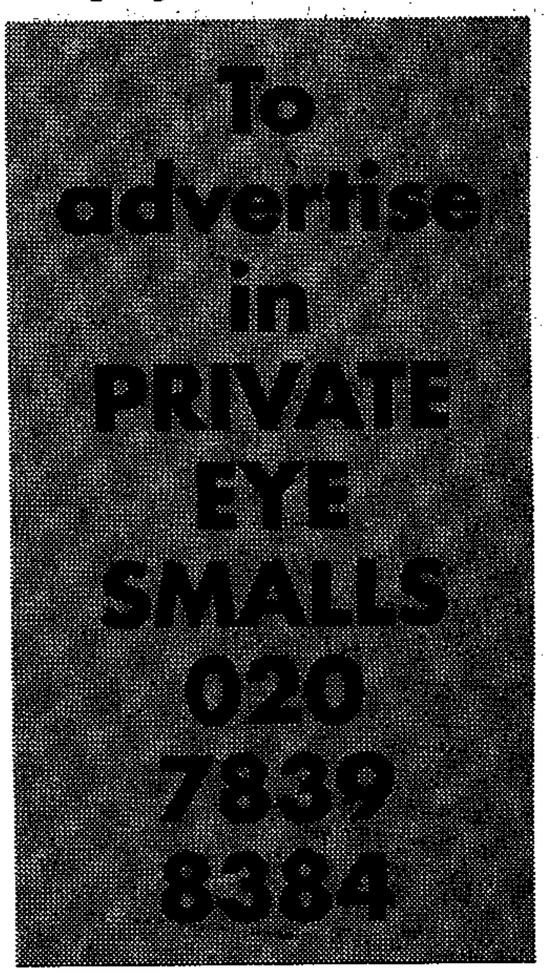

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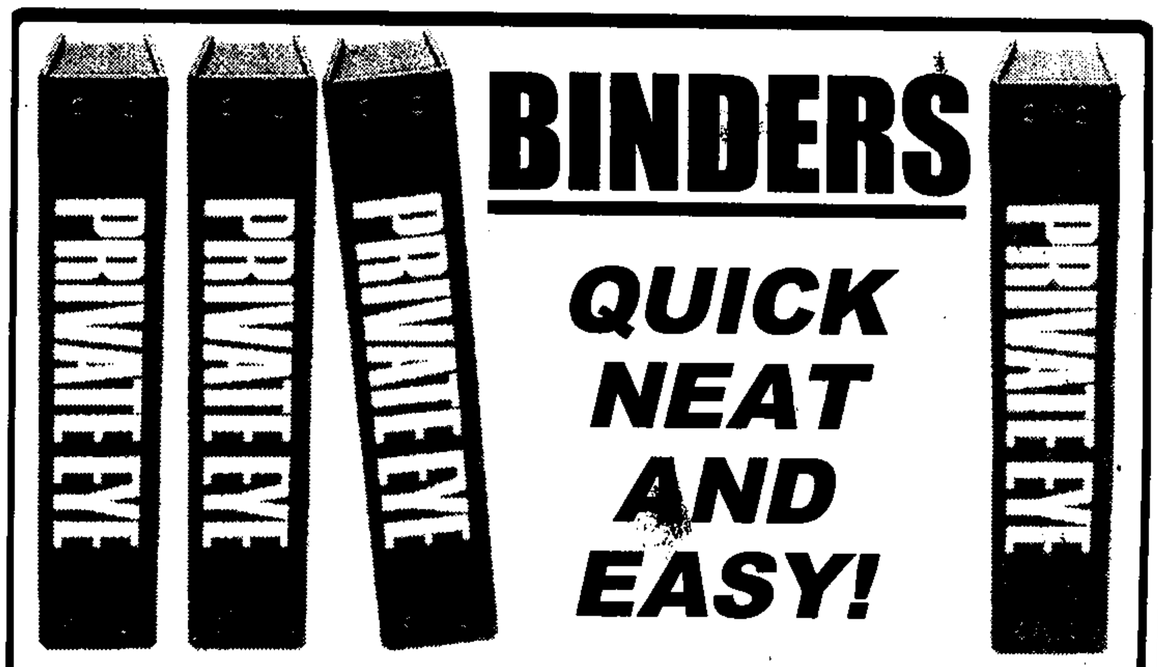

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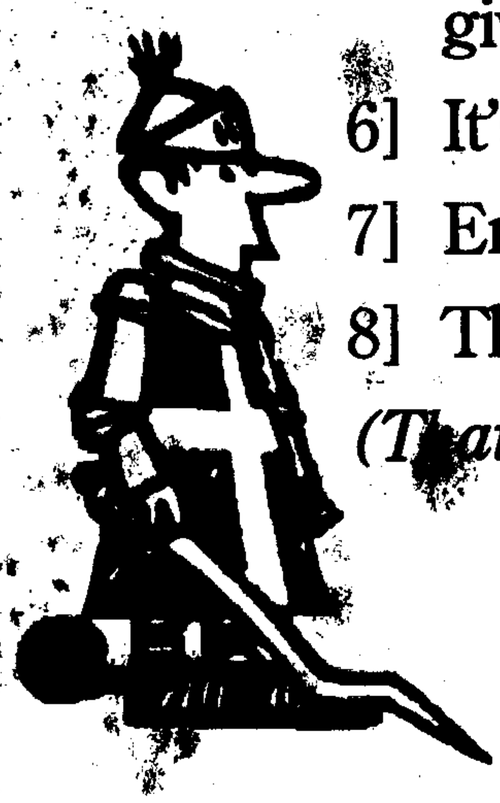

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